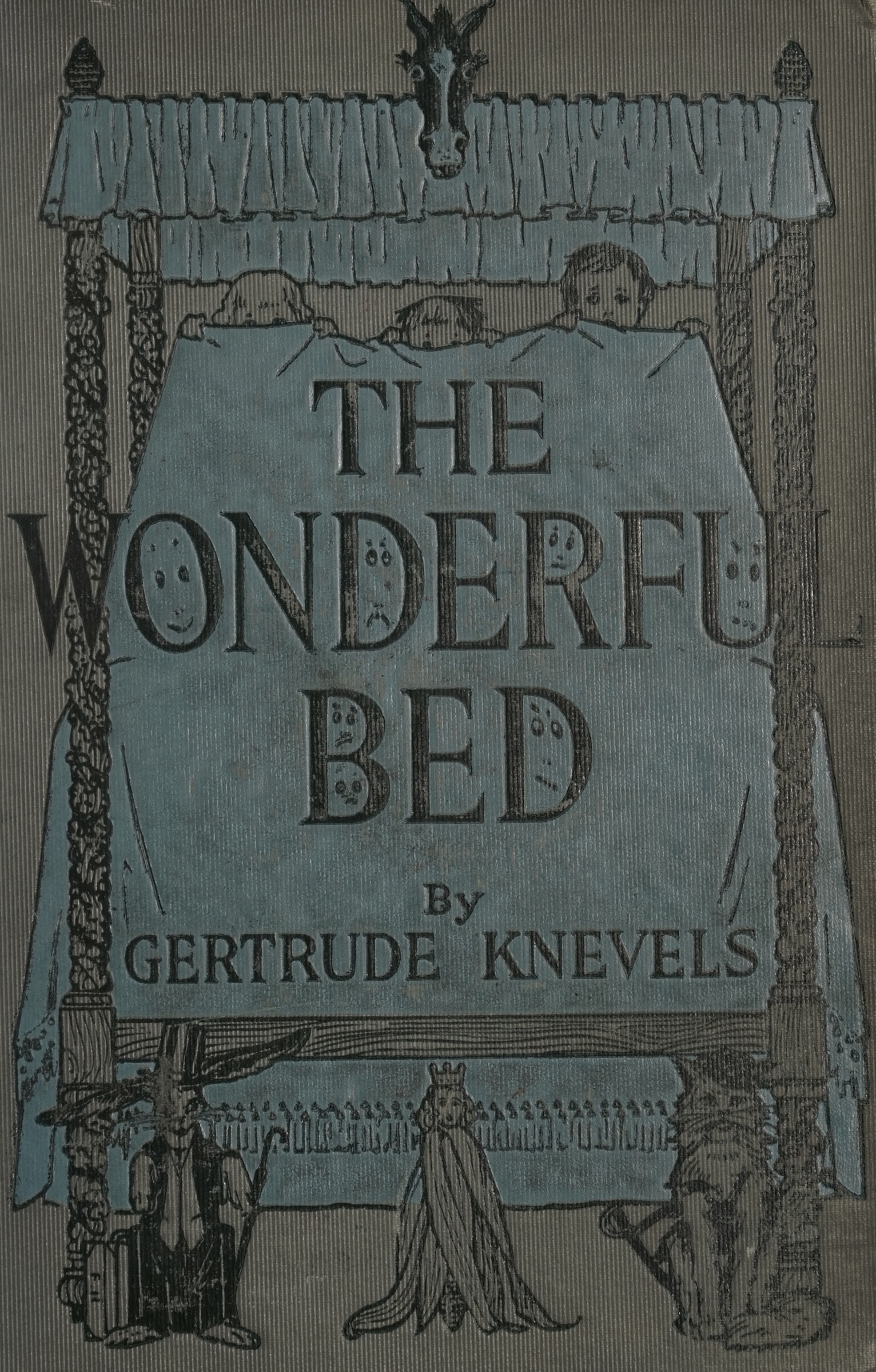

THE WONDERFUL BED

By

GERTRUDE KNEVELS

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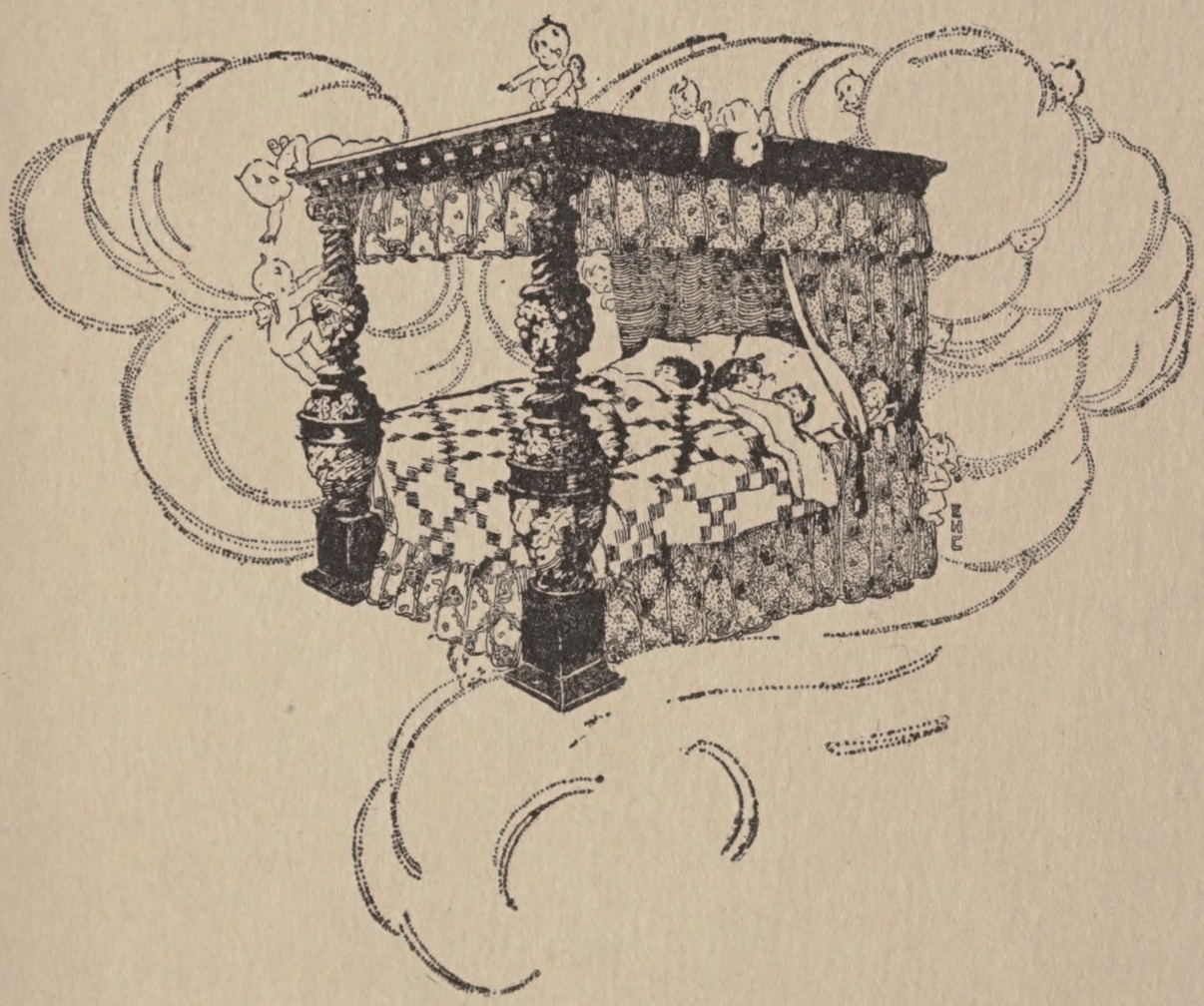

EMILY HALL CHAMBERLIN

THE WONDERFUL BED

By

GERTRUDE KNEVELS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

EMILY HALL CHAMBERLIN

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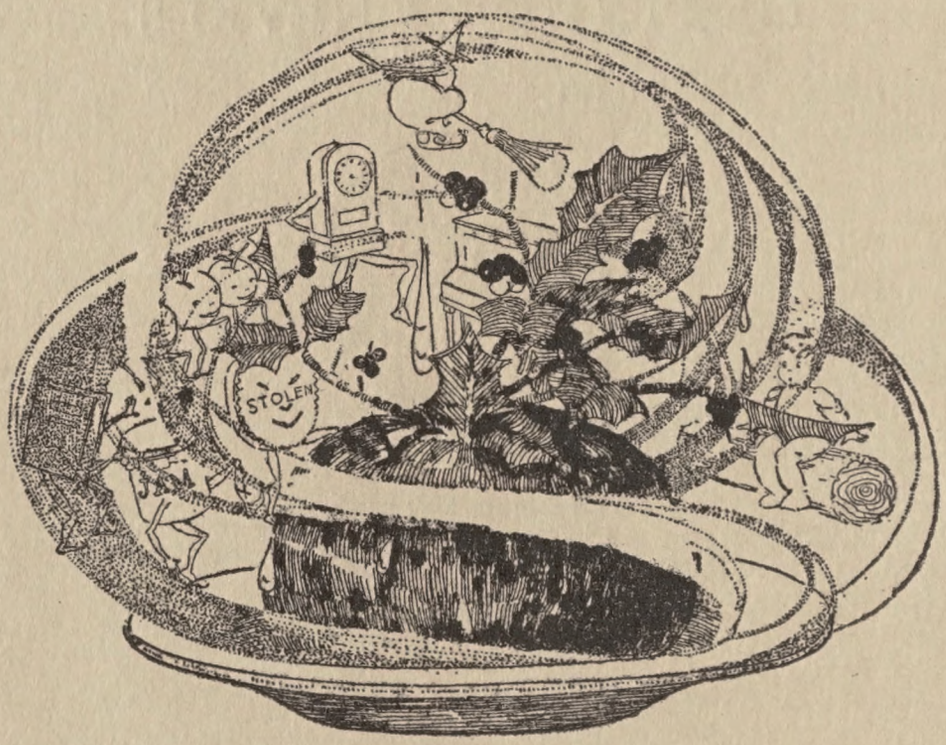

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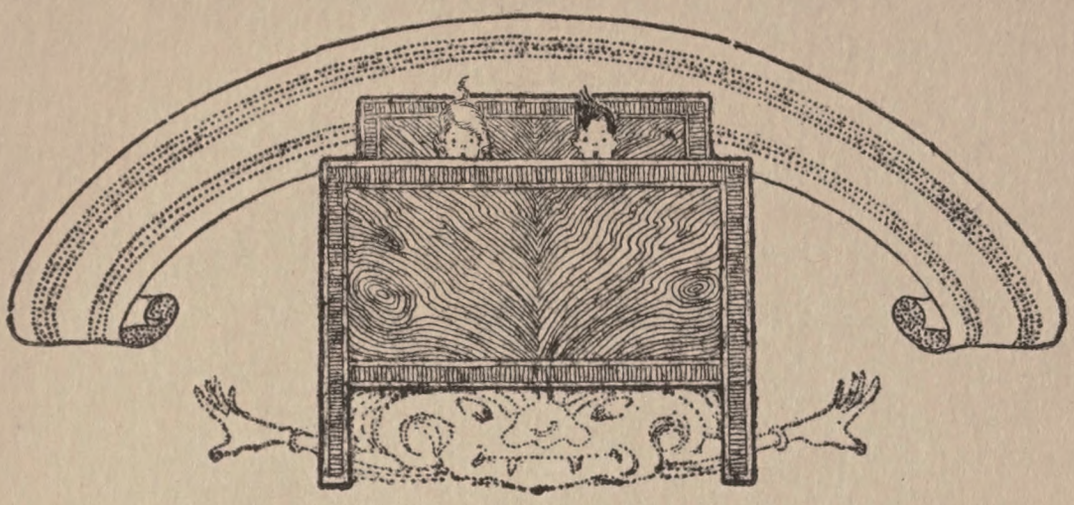

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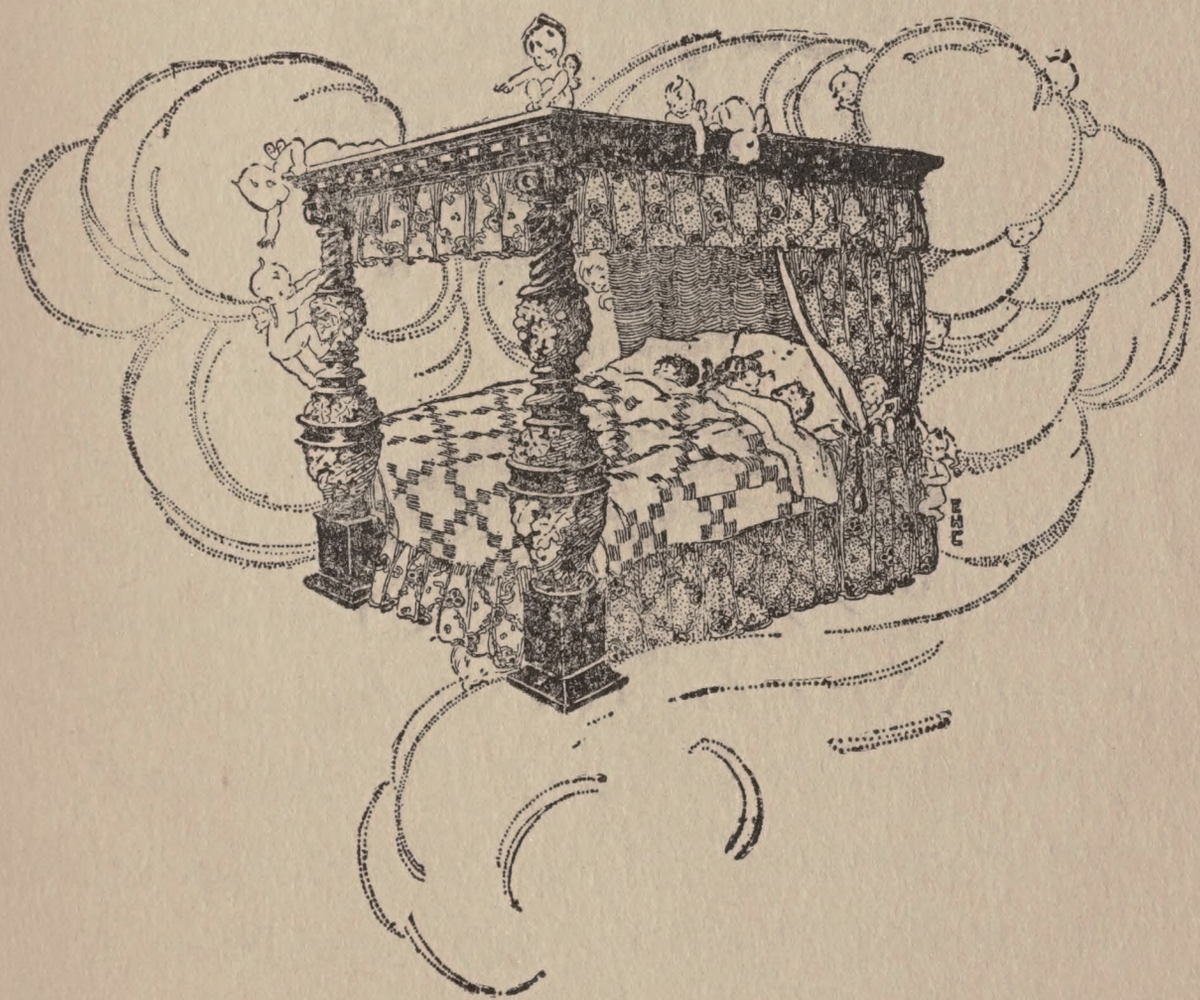

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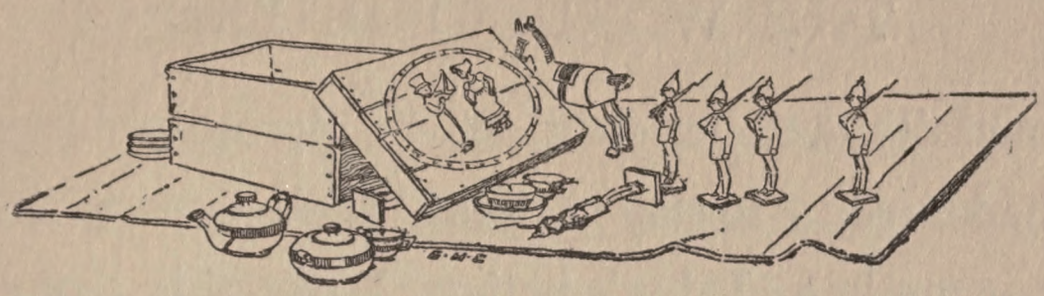


THE WONDERFUL BED

CHAPTER I

AUNT JANE'S OLD TOYS

IT WAS beginning to get dark in the big nursery. Outside the wind howled and the rain beat steadily against the window-pane. Rudolf and Ann sat as close to the fire as they could get, waiting for Betsy to bring the lamp. Peter had built himself a comfortable den beneath the table and was having a quiet game of Bears with Mittens, the cat, for his cub—quiet, that is, except for an angry mew now and then from Mittens, who had not enjoyed an easy moment since the arrival of the three children that morning.

"Rudolf," Ann was saying, as she looked

uneasily over her shoulder, "I almost wish we hadn't come to stay at Aunt Jane's alone without mother. I don't believe I like this room, it's so big and creepy. I don't want to go to bed. Especially"—she added, turning about and pointing into the shadows behind her—"especially I don't want to go to bed in that!"

The big bed in Aunt Jane's old nursery was the biggest and queerest the children had ever seen. It was the very opposite of the little white enameled beds they were used to sleeping in at their apartment in New York, being a great old-fashioned four-poster with a canopy almost touching the ceiling. It was hung with faded chintz, and instead of a mattress it had a billowy feather bed over which were tucked grandmother's hand-spun sheets and blankets covered by the gayest of quilts in an elaborate pattern of sprigged and spotted calico patches. The two front posts of the bed were of dark

shiny wood carved in a strange design of twisted leaves and branches, and to Ann, as she looked at them by the leaping flickering firelight, it seemed as if from between these leaves and branches odd little faces peered and winked at her, vanished, and came again and yet again.

"Bother!" exclaimed Rudolf so loud that his little sister started. "It's just a bed, that's all. It'll be jolly fun getting into it. I believe I'll ask if I can't sleep there, too, instead of in the cot. I wanted to take a running jump at it when we first came this morning, but Aunt Jane wouldn't let me with my boots on. She said she made that quilt herself, when she was a little girl. We'll all climb in together tonight as soon as Betsy goes, and have a game of something—I dare say we'll feel just like raisins in a pudding!"

"All the same," said Ann, "I don't think I

like it, Rudolf. I wish Betsy would bring the lamp!"

It was almost dark now, and they could not see, but only hear, Peter as he came shuffling out of his den, dragging his unhappy cub, and prowled around the darkest corners of the room. Being a bear, he was not at all afraid, but made himself very happy for a while with pouncing and growling, searching for honey, and eating imaginary travelers. Then the cub escaped, and Peter tired of his game. Rudolf and Ann heard him tugging at the door of an old-fashioned cupboard in a far corner of the room, and presently he came over to the fire, carrying a wooden box in his arms.

"Oh, Peter, you naughty boy!" cried Ann. "You've been at the cupboard, and Aunt Jane said expressly we were not to take anything out of it!"

"You are just like Bluebeard's wife," began

Rudolf, but Peter—as was his way—paid no attention to either of them. He put the box down on the hearth-rug, and got on his hands and knees to open it. Then, of course, the other two thought they might as well see what there was to see, and all three heads bent over the box. After all it contained nothing very wonderful, the cover itself being the prettiest part, Ann thought, for on it was painted a bright-colored picture of a little girl in a funny, high-waisted, old-fashioned dress, making a curtsy to a little boy dressed like an old gentleman and carrying a toy ship in his hand. The box was filled with old toys, most of them chipped or broken. There was a very small tea-set with at least half of the cups missing, a wooden horse which only possessed three legs, and the remains of a regiment of battered tin soldiers.

"How funny the box smells—and the toys,

too!" Ann said. "Sort of queer and yet sweet, like mother's glove case. I think she said it was sandal-wood. That set must have been a darling when it was new, but there's only just a speck of blue left and the gilt is every bit gone. These must be Aunt Jane's toys that she had when she was little."

"That was a long time ago," remarked Rudolf thoughtfully. "I don't see why Aunt Jane didn't throw 'em away, they're awful trash, I think. Those soldiers aren't bad, but—"

Just then Ann's sharp eyes caught Peter as he was about to slip away with a little parcel done up in silver paper that had lain all by itself at the very bottom of the box. By this time she and Rudolf had both forgotten that they had no more right than Peter to any of the things in the box, and both threw themselves on their little brother. Peter fought and kicked, but was at last forced to surrender the

little parcel. Under the silver paper which Rudolf hurriedly tore off, was layer after layer of pink tissue infolding something which the boy, when he came to it at last, tossed on the floor in his disgust.

"Pshaw," he exclaimed, "it's nothing in the world but an old corn-cob!"

"Yes, it is, too," said Ann, picking it up. "It's a doll, the funniest old doll I ever saw!"

And a strange little doll she was, made out of nothing more or less than a withered corn-cob, her face—such a queer little face—painted on it, and her hair and dress made very cleverly out of the corn shucks. Ann burst out laughing as she looked at the old doll, and turning to her new children, Marie-Louise and Angelina-Elfrida, which her mother had given her for Christmas, she placed the two beauties on the hearth-rug, one on each side of the corn-cob, just to see the dif-

ference. This seemed to make Peter very cross. He tried his best to snatch away the old doll, but Rudolf, to tease him, held him off with one hand while with the other he seized the poor creature by her long braids and swung her slowly over the fire.

"Wouldn't it be fun, Ann," said he, "to see how quick she'd burn?"

"Oh, you mustn't, Rudolf," Ann cried, "Aunt Jane mightn't like it. I shouldn't be surprised if she'd punish you."

At that Rudolf lowered the old doll almost into the blaze, and she would most certainly have burned up, she was so very dry and crackly, if at that very moment Aunt Jane had not come into the room and snatched her out of his hand. Rudolf never remembered to have seen Aunt Jane so vexed before. Her blue eyes flashed, and her cheeks were quite pink under her silver-colored hair. He ex-

pected she would scold, but she didn't, she only said—"Oh, Rudolf!" in a rather unpleasant way, and then, after she had carefully restored the corn-cob doll to her wrappings, she knelt down and began to gather up the old toys which the children had scattered over the hearth-rug. Ann and Rudolf helped her, and Peter who, though a very mischievous little boy, was always honest, confessed that he had been the one to open the old cupboard and take out the box. He seemed to feel rather uncomfortable about it, and after the things had been put away, he climbed upon Aunt Jane's lap and hid his head upon her shoulder.

"Never mind, Peter, dear," she said, holding him very tight, "I always meant to show you my old toys some day. I dare say you children think it strange that I have kept such shabby things so long, but when I was a little girl I did not have such beautiful toys as you

have now, and the few I had I loved very dearly."

"Was this your nursery, Aunt Jane," Ann asked.

"Yes, dear. I slept all alone in the big bed, and I kept my toys always in the old cupboard. I spent many and many an hour curled up on that window-seat, playing with my doll. Yes, I did have others, Ann, but I think I loved the corn-cob doll best of all, perhaps because she was the least beautiful."

"Didn't you have any little boys to play with?" Rudolf asked. "Other boys beside father and Uncle Jim, I mean."

"There was one little boy who came sometimes," Aunt Jane said. "He lived in the nearest house to ours, though that was a mile away. Those were his tin soldiers you saw in the box. He gave them to me to keep for him when he

went away to school, and thought himself too big to play at soldiers any more."

"And when he came back from school, did he used to come and see you?"

"Yes, he used to come every summer till he got big."

"And what did the little boy do when he got big, Aunt Jane?"

"When he got big," said Aunt Jane slowly, looking very hard into the fire, "he went away to sea."

"O-ho!" cried Rudolf. "And when he came back what did he bring you?"

"He never did come back," said Aunt Jane, and she bent her head low over Peter's so that the children should not see how shiny wet her eyes were. Ann and Rudolf did see, however, and politely forced back the dozen questions trembling on the tips of their tongues about

the different ways there were of being lost at sea. Rudolf in particular would have liked to know whether it was a hurricane or sharks or pirates or a nice desert island that had been the end of that little boy, and he was about to begin his questioning in a roundabout manner by asking whether sea serpents had often been known to swallow ships whole, when the door opened, and in came Betsy, Aunt Jane's old servant. She had the lamp in one hand and the great brass warming-pan, with which she always warmed the big bed, in the other.

Her arrival disturbed the pleasant group by the nursery fire, and reminded Aunt Jane that it was the children's bedtime. She kissed them good night, heard them say their prayers, and then went quickly away, leaving Betsy to help them undress. Now this was rather unwise of Aunt Jane, for Betsy and the children did not get

on. She was one of those uncomfortable persons who refuse to understand how a little conversation makes undressing so much less unpleasant. She was not inclined to give Rudolf any information on the subject of sea serpents, nor would she listen to Ann's remarks on how much more fashionable hot-water bottles were than warming-pans. She had even no sympathy for Peter when he wished to be considered a diver going down to the bottom of the sea after gold, instead of a little boy being bathed in a tin tub.

Betsy had a horrid way of scrubbing, being none too careful about soap in people's eyes, and Peter came out dreadfully clean. Feeling that he needed comforting of some sort, he looked about for Mittens and discovered him at last, taking a much needed nap behind the sofa. Squeezing the weary cat carefully under one arm, Peter began to climb by the aid of a

chair into the big bed. Betsy caught sight of him and guessed his plan. Poor little Peter's hopes were dashed.

"No you don't, Master Peter," she snapped at him. "Ye don't take no cats to bed with ye —not in this house!" And she grabbed Mittens away very roughly, set him outside the door, and shut it with a bang. After she had tucked the bedclothes firmly about the little boy, she turned her attention to Rudolf and Ann, evidently thinking Peter was settled for the night—which shows just how much Betsy knew about him. Peter waited patiently till she was in the depths of an argument with Rudolf who was trying vainly to make her understand that the dirt upon his face was merely the effect of his dark complexion. Then Peter slipped out of bed, darted out of the door, and returned in a moment or two with the unhappy Mittens once more a prisoner be-

neath his arm. This time he managed to conceal the cat from Betsy's sharp eyes.

At last all three children were in the big bed, Rudolf having refused to consider sleeping in the cot, and Betsy, after a gruff good night, departed, carrying the lamp with her. Now that the room was in darkness except for the flickering light of the dying fire, Ann's fears began to come back to her. She sat up in bed and peered round her into the dark corners.

"I—I wish Betsy had left the light," she said. "But it would have been no use asking her."

"Not a scrap," said Rudolf. "Not that *I* mind the dark," he added hastily, "*I* rather like it, only don't let's lie still and—and—listen for things. Let's play something."

"Shall we try who can keep their eyes shut longest," suggested Ann.

"Oh, that's a stupid game! Beside Peter would beat anyway, for he's half asleep now. Shake him up, Ann."

When shaken up Peter refused to admit that he was even sleepy. He was very cross, and immediately began to accuse Rudolf of having taken his cat. This Rudolf—and also Ann—denied. They had seen Peter smuggle Mittens into bed the second time, but had supposed he must have escaped and followed Betsy out.

"No, he didn't neither," Peter insisted. "I had him after she went. He was 'most tamed."

"Then," said Ann, "he must be in the room and we might as well have him to play with. Rudolf, I dare you to get up and look for him!"

And Rudolf got up—just to show he was not afraid. Before stepping into those dark shadows, however, he armed himself with his

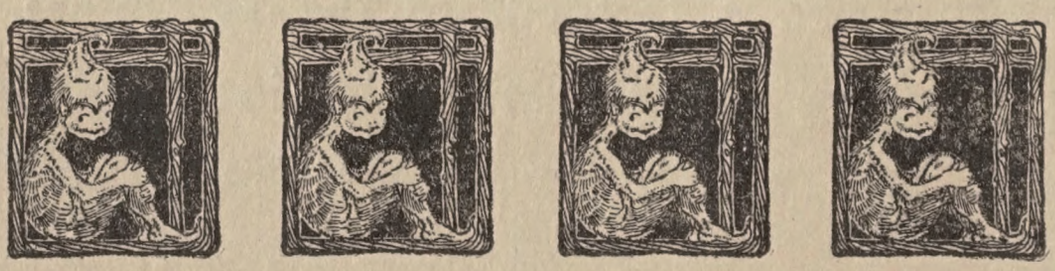
tin sword, a weapon he was in the habit of taking to bed with him in case of burglars, and with this he poked bravely under the bed and in all the dark corners, calling and coaxing Mittens to come forth. At last both he and Ann felt sure the cat could not be in the room.

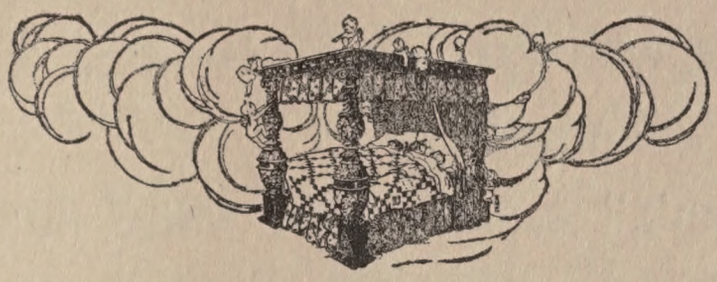
"He *must* have got out somehow," said Rudolf. "Anyway, I sha'n't bother any more looking for him." Still grasping his sword, he climbed back into the big bed between his brother and sister. Peter was still cross and grumbly. He kept insisting that Mittens might have disappeared *inside* the bed—which was a piece of nonsense neither of the others would listen to.

After some discussion Rudolf and Ann agreed that the very nicest thing to do would be to make a tent out of the bedclothes, and seeing Peter was again inclined to nod, they shook him awake and sternly

insisted on his joining in the game. By tying the two upper corners of the covers to the posts at the head of the great bed a splendid tent was quickly made, bigger than any the children had ever played in before, so big that Rudolf, who was to lead the procession into its white depths, began to feel just the least little bit afraid,—of what he hardly knew. How high the white walls rose! Not like a snuggly bed-tent, but like—like a real white-walled cave. Being a brave boy, he quickly put these unpleasant thoughts out of his mind, and grasping his sword, crawled on his hands and knees into the dark opening. Behind him came Ann, and behind Ann, Peter.

"Are you ready?" asked Rudolf. "Then in we go!"





CHAPTER II

THE ANGRY WARMING-PAN

IT WAS not surprising that the big bed should be different from any other bed the children had ever played in, yet it was certainly taking them a long, long time to crawl to the foot!

"It must have a foot," thought the brave captain of the band, as he plunged farther and farther into the depths of the white cave. "All beds have." Then he stopped suddenly as a loud squeal of mingled surprise and terror came from just behind him.

"Oh, Rudolf," Ann cried, "I don't want to play this game any longer—let's go back!" In the half-darkness Rudolf felt her turn round

on Peter, who was close behind her. "Go back, Peter," she ordered.

"I can't," came a little voice out of the gloom.

"You must—oh, Peter, hurry!"

"I can't go back," said Peter calmly, "because there isn't any back. Put your hand behind me and feel."

It was true. Just how or when it had happened none of them could tell, but the soft drooping bedcovers had suddenly, mysteriously risen and spread into firm white walls behind and on either side, leaving only a narrow passageway open in front. It was nonsense to go on their hands and knees any longer, for even Rudolf, who was tallest, could not touch the arched white roof when he stood up and stretched his arm above his head. He could not see Ann's face clearly, but he could hear her beginning to sniff.

"Now, Ann," said he sternly, though in rather a weak voice, "don't you know what this is? This is an adventure."

"I don't care," sniffed Ann, "I don't want an adventure. I want to go back—back to Aunt Jane!" And the sniff developed into a flood of tears.

"Peter is not crying, and he is only six."

This rebuke told on Ann, for she was almost eight. "But what are we go—going to do?" she asked, her sobs decreasing into sniffs again.

"We'll just have to go on, I suppose, and see what happens."

"Well, I think—I think Aunt Jane ought to be ashamed of herself to put us in such a big bed we could get lost in it!"

"Maybe"—came the voice of Peter cheerfully from behind them—"maybe she *wanted* to lose us, like bad people does kittens."

"Peter, don't be silly," ordered Rudolf

sternly. "There isn't really anything that can happen to us," he went on, speaking slowly and thoughtfully, "because we all know that we really are in bed. We know we didn't get *out,* so of course we must be *in.*"

This was good sense, yet somehow it was not so comforting as it ought to have been, not even to Rudolf himself who now began to be troubled by a disagreeable kind of lump in his throat. Luckily he remembered, in time to save himself from the disgrace of tears, how his father had once told him that whistling was an excellent remedy for boys who did not feel quite happy in their minds. He began to whistle now, a poor, weak, little whistle at first, but growing stronger as he began to feel more cheerful. Grasping his sword, he started ahead, calling to the others to follow him.

The white passage was so narrow that the children had to walk along it one behind an-

other in Indian file. The floor was no longer soft and yielding but firm and hard under their feet, and by stretching out their hands they could almost touch the smooth white walls on either side of them. At first the way was perfectly straight ahead, but after they had walked what seemed to them a long, long time, the passage curved sharply and widened a little. The children noticed, much to their relief, that it was growing lighter around them.

"I'm getting tired," Ann announced at last. "See, Ruddy, there is a nice flat black rock. Let's sit down and rest on it."

There was room for them all on the large flat rock, and when they were settled on it, Peter remarked: "I'm hungry!" Now this was a thing Peter was used to saying at all times and on all occasions, so it was just like him to bring it out now as cheerfully and con-

fidently as if Betsy had been at his elbow with a plate of bread and butter.

"Oh, dear," Ann exclaimed, "what a long, long while it seems since we had our tea! I suppose it will soon be time to think about starving." And she took her little handkerchief out of the pocket of her nighty and began to wipe her eyes with it.

"Not yet," said Rudolf hastily. "I put some candy into my pajamas pocket when I went to bed, because the time I like to eat it best is just before breakfast—if people only wouldn't row so about my doing it. Let me see—it was two chocolate mice I had—I hope they didn't get squashed when we were playing! No, here they are." The chocolate mice were a little the worse for wear, in fact there were white streaks on them where the chocolate had rubbed off on the inside of Rudolf's pocket, but the children didn't mind that. They

thought they had never seen anything that looked more delicious.

"I will cut them in three pieces with my sword," said Rudolf. "You may have the heads, Ann, and me the middle parts, and Peter the tails because he is the youngest."

This arrangement did not suit Peter. "I will *not* eat the tails," he screamed, kicking his heels angrily against the rock,—"the tails is made out of nassy old string!" And, I am sorry to say, Peter made a snatch at both chocolate mice and knocked them out of Rudolf's hand. This, of course, made it necessary for Rudolf to box Peter's ears, and a tussle quickly followed, in the middle of which something dreadful happened. The large flat rock they were sitting on gave several queer shakes and heaves and then suddenly rose right up under the three children and threw them head over heels into the air. They were not a bit hurt,

but they were very, very much surprised when they scrambled to their feet and saw the rock erect on a long kind of tail it had, glaring at them out of one red angry eye.

Ann was the first to recognize it. "Oh, oh," she cried, "it's not a rock at all—it's Betsy's Warming-pan!"

The Pan, giving a deep throaty kind of growl, began to shuffle toward them. "I'd like to have the warming of *you* three," he snarled. "I'll teach you to come sitting on top of me playing your tricks on my rheumatic bones—waking me out of the first good nap I've had in weeks!—I'll fix you—"

"We're really very sorry," Ann began. "We didn't mean to sit on you, we thought—"

But the Warming-pan did not want to hear what Ann thought. He turned round on her fiercely. "*You're* the young person," he snapped, "who made the polite remarks about

my figure this evening? Eh, didn't you? Can you deny it? Called me old-fashioned and 'country'—said nobody ever used *me* any more!—I'll teach you to talk about hot-water bottles when *I'm* through with you!" As he spoke he came closer and closer to Ann, snorting and puffing and glaring at her out of his one terrible eye. Although he was so round and waddled so clumsily, dragging his long tail behind him, his appearance was quite dreadful. He reminded Rudolf of the dragon in Peter's picture-book, and he hastily tried to imagine how Saint George must have felt when defending his princess. Clutching his sword, he thrust himself in front of Ann and bravely faced the Warming-pan. "Run!" he called to the others, "Fly!—and I will fight this monster to the death."

Ann, dragging Peter by the hand, made off as fast as she could go, and the Pan tried his

best to dodge Rudolf and rush after her. Again and again Rudolf's sword struck him, but it only rattled on his brassiness, and making a horrible face, he popped three live coals out of his mouth which rolled on the ground unpleasantly close to Rudolf's bare toes. Then they had it hot and heavy until at last the knight managed to get his blade entangled with the dragon's long tail, and tripped the creature up. Then, without waiting for his enemy to get himself together again and heartily tired of playing Saint George, Rudolf turned and ran after Ann and Peter. Long before he caught up to them, however, he heard the Pan behind him, snorting and scolding. Luckily it did not seem able to stop talking, so that it lost what little breath it had and was soon obliged to halt. For some time Rudolf caught snatches of its unpleasant remarks, such as—"Children nowadays—wish he had

'em—he'd show 'em—bread and water—good thick stick!—" Rudolf was obliged to run with his fingers in his ears before that disagreeable voice died away in the distance.

At last he saw Peter and Ann waiting for him at a turn in the passage just ahead, and in another moment he flung himself panting on the ground beside them. "What a beast he was!" Rudolf exclaimed.

"Dreadful!" said Ann. "I shall tell Aunt Jane never, never to let Betsy put him in our bed again." And then, after she had thanked Rudolf very prettily for saving her life, and that hero had recovered his breath and rested a little after the excitement of the battle, they all felt ready to start on their way again.

No sooner had they turned the corner ahead of them than they found themselves in broad daylight. The passage was now so wide that all three could walk abreast, holding hands; a

moment more and they stood at the mouth of the long white cave or tunnel they had been walking through. There was open country beyond them, and just opposite to where the children stood was the queerest little house that they had ever seen. It was long and very low, hardly more than one story high, and was painted blue and white in stripes running lengthwise. In the middle was a little front door with a window on either side of it and three square blue and white striped steps leading up to it. From the chimney a trail of thick white smoke poured out. As the three children stood staring at the house, Peter cried out: "It's snowing!"

Sure enough the air was full of thick white flakes.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" Ann wailed, "what shall we do now? We can't go back in the cave because the Warming-pan might catch us, and

if we stay here Peter will catch his death of cold out in the snow in his night drawers—and so will we all. Oh, what *would* mother say!"

"But we are not out in the snow, Ann," began Rudolf in his arguing voice. "We are *in* in the snow."

"And it is not wet," added Peter who was trying to roll a snowball out of the white flakes that were piling themselves on the ground with amazing quickness.

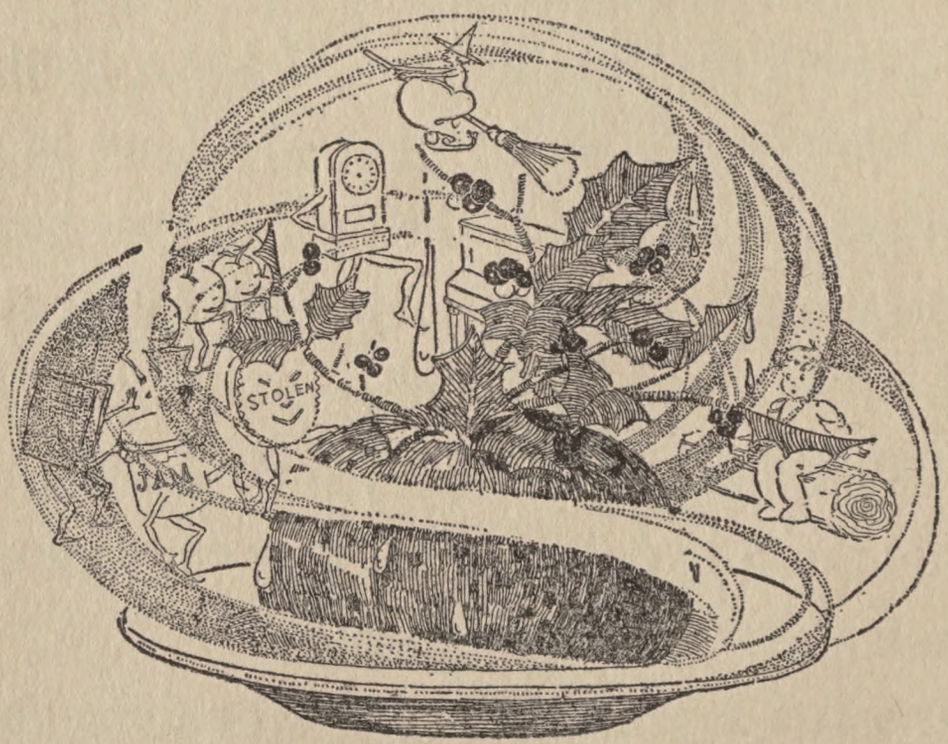
"I don't care," said Ann. "I know mother wouldn't like us to be in in it or out in it. I'm going to knock at the door of that house this minute and ask if they won't let us stay there till the storm's over."

"All right," said Rudolf, "only I hope the people who live there don't happen to be any relation of the Warming-pan."

It was a dreadful thought. The three children looked at the house and hesitated. Then

Rudolf laughed, drew his precious sword, which he had fastened into the belt of his pajamas, and mounted the steps, the others following behind him.

"You be all ready to run," he whispered, "if you don't like the looks of the person who comes. Now!" And he knocked long and loud upon the blue and white striped door.



CHAPTER III

A VISIT TO THE GOOSE

THE door flew open almost before Rudolf had stopped knocking, but there was nothing very alarming about the person who stood on the threshold. Ann said afterward she had thought at first it was a Miss Spriggins who came sometimes to sew for her mother, but it was not; it was only a very large gray goose neatly dressed in blue and white bed-ticking, with a large white apron tied round her waist and wearing big spectacles with black rims to them.

"Nothing to-day, thank you," said the Goose.

"But please—" began Rudolf.

"No soap, no baking powder, no light-

ning rods, no hearth-brooms, no cake tins, no life insurance—" rattled the Goose so rapidly that the children could hardly understand her —"nothing at all to-day, *thank* you!"

"But *we* want something," Ann cried, "we want to come in!"

"I never let in peddlers," said the Goose, and she slammed the door in their faces. As she slammed it one of her broad apron-strings caught in the crack, and Rudolf seized the end of it. When the Goose opened the door an inch or so to free herself he held on firmly and said:

"Tell us, please, are you the Warming-pan's aunt?"

The Gray Goose looked immensely pleased, but shook her head.

"Nothing so simple," said she, "nor, so to speak, commonplace, since the relationship or connection if you will have it, is, though per-

fectly to be distinguished, not always, as it were, entirely clear, through his great-grandfather who, as I hope you are aware, was a Dutch-Oven, having run away with a cousin of my mother's uncle's stepfather, who was three times married, numbers one, two and three all having children but none of 'em resembling one another in the slightest, which, as you may have perceived, is only the beginning of the story, but if you will now come in, not forgetting to wipe your feet, and try to follow me very carefully, I'll be delighted to explain all particulars."

The children were glad to follow the Lady Goose into the house, though they thought she had been quite particular enough. They found it impossible to wipe their feet upon the mat because it was thick with snow, and when the door was closed behind them, they were surprised to feel that it was snowing

even harder inside the house than it was out. For a moment they stood half blinded by the storm, unable to see clearly what kind of room they were in or to tell whose were the voices they heard so plainly. A great fluttering, cackling, and complaining was going on close to them, and a hoarse voice cried out:

"One hundred and seventeen and three-quarters feathers to be multiplied by two-sevenths of a pound. That's a sweet one! Do that if you can, Squealer."

"You can't do it yourself," a whining voice replied. "I've tried the back and the corners and the edges—there's no more room—"

Then came the sound of a sudden smack, as if some one's ears had been boxed when he least expected it, and this was followed by a loud angry squawk. Now the flakes, which had been gradually thinning, died away entirely,

and the children suddenly discovered that they had not been snowflakes at all but only a cloud of white feathers sent whirling through the house, out of the windows, and up the chimney by some disturbance in the midst of a great heap in one corner of the room as high as a haystack. From the middle of this heap of feathers stuck up two very thin yellow legs with shabby boots that gave one last despairing kick and then were still. Near by at a counter a Gentleman Goose in a long apron was weighing feathers on a very small pair of scales, and at his elbow stood a little duck apprentice with the tears running down his cheeks. He was doing sums in a greasy sort of butcher's book that seemed quite full already of funny scratchy figures.

"That must be Squealer, the one who got his ears boxed," whispered Ann to Rudolf,

"but what do you suppose is the matter with the other duck, the one in the heap? He will be smothered, I know he will!"

Rudolf thought so, too, yet it didn't seem polite to mention it. The Lady Goose had been busily helping the children to brush off the feathers that were sticking to them, and patting Peter on the back with her bill because he said he was sure he had swallowed at least a pound. She now brought forward chairs for them all. As the children looked around more closely they saw that the room they were in was a very cozy sort of place, long and low and neatly furnished with a white deal table, a shiny black cook-stove, a great many bright copper saucepans, and a red geranium in the window. A large iron pot was boiling merrily on the stove and from time to time the Gray Goose stirred its contents with a wooden spoon. It smelled rather

good, and Peter, sniffing, began to put on his hungry expression.

"No, not even a family resemblance," went on the Gray Goose, waving her spoon, "although, as is generally known, a Roman nose is characteristic in our family, having developed in fact at the time of that little affair when we repelled the Gauls in the year—"

But Rudolf felt he could not stand much more of this. "I beg your pardon," he interrupted, "but would you mind if we helped the little one out of the heap, the—the—duck who is getting so thoroughly smothered?"

"Not at all, if you care about it," said the Gray Goose kindly. "Squawker'll be good now, won't he, Father?"

"Oh, I'm sure he'll be good," Ann cried, and she ran ahead of Rudolf to catch hold of one of the thin yellow legs and give it a mighty pull.

"He'll be good," said the Gentleman Goose gravely, speaking for the first time, "when he's roasted. Very good indeed'll Squawker be—with apple sauce!" And he smacked his lips and winked at Peter who was standing close beside him, looking up earnestly into his face.

Peter thought a moment. Then he said: *"I* likes currant jelly on my duck. I eats apple sauce on goose."

The Gentleman Goose appeared suddenly uncomfortable. He began nervously stuffing little parcels of the feathers he had been weighing into small blue and white striped bags, which he threw one after the other to Squealer, who never by any chance caught them as he turned his back at every throw. "I suppose," said the Gentleman Goose to Peter in a hesitating, anxious sort of voice, "you believe along with all the rest, what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, don't you? I suppose

there's nothing sauce-y about yourself now, is there?" And apparently comforted by his miserable little joke he went on with his weighing.

By this time the other little duck had been hauled out of the heap of feathers by Ann and Rudolf, and stood coughing and sneezing and gasping in the middle of the floor. As soon as he had breath enough he began calling pitifully for some one to brush the down off his Sunday trousers. The Gray Goose came good-naturedly to his assistance, but as she brushed him all the wrong way, the children couldn't see that she improved him very much. Squawker seemed quite pleased, however, and turned himself round and round for their approval.

"What kind of birds are these new ones?" he asked the Lady Goose when she had finished with him.

"Why just three more of us, Squawker, dear," she answered.

This remark made all three children open their eyes very wide.

"Nonsense," began Rudolf angrily, "*we* aren't geese!"

From the other end of the room came the voice of the Gentleman Goose, who spoke without turning round. "What makes you think that?" he asked.

"Because we aren't—we—"

—"You're molting pretty badly, of course, now you mention it," interrupted the Lady Goose, "you and the little one. But this one's feathers seem in nice condition." As she spoke she laid a long claw lovingly on Ann's head. "How much would you say a pound, father?"

"Can't say till I get 'em in the scales, of course," and, smoothing down his apron, the Gentleman Goose advanced toward Ann in a

businesslike fashion. The two little apprentices, carrying bags, followed at his heels.

Ann clung to Rudolf. "I haven't any feathers," she screamed. "They're curls. I'm not a nasty bird—I'm a little girl with hair!"

"She doesn't want to be plucked!" exclaimed the Gray Goose who had returned to the stove to stir the contents of the iron pot. "Well, now, did you ever! Maybe it goes in her family. I had a great-aunt once on my father's side who—"

"They're feathers, all right," chuckled Squawker. "You're a perfect little duck, that's what I think."

"Me, too," chimed in Squealer.

The Gentleman Goose reached over the Lady Goose's shoulder, snatched the spectacles off her nose without so much as by your leave, set them crookedly on his own, and looked over them long and earnestly at Ann. "So you

want to call 'em hair, do you?" he snapped. "I suppose you think you belong in a hair mattress!"

Ann was ready to cry, and Rudolf had drawn his sword with the intention of doing his best to protect her, when at that moment a new voice was heard. Looking in at the little window over the top of the red geranium the children saw a good-humored furry face with long bristly whiskers and bright twinkly eyes.

"Anybody mention my name?" said the voice, and a large Belgian Hare leaped lightly into the room. He was handsomely dressed in a light overcoat and checked trousers, and wore gaiters over his patent-leather boots. He had a thick gold watch-chain, gold studs and cuff buttons besides other jewelry, and in one hand he carried a high hat, in the other a small dress-suit case and a tightly rolled umbrella.

"What's the matter here?" he inquired cheerfully.

"Why, this bird," explained the Gentleman Goose, pointing his claw disdainfully at Ann, "says it has no feathers, which you can see for yourself is not the case. It has feathers, therefore it is a bird. Birds of a feather flock together. That settles it, I think! Come along, boys. To work!"

At his command the two duck apprentices, who were standing one on either side of Ann, made feeble dashes at the two long curls nearest them. Rudolf stepped forward but the Hare was before him. He only needed to stare at the two ducks through a single eye-glass he had screwed into one of his eyes to make them turn pale and drop their claws to their sides.

"Now once more," said the Hare to Ann. "What did you say you call those unpleasantly long whiskers of yours?"

"Hair," Ann answered meekly, for she was too frightened to be offended.

"Hair!" echoed Rudolf and Peter loudly.

"Bless me," said their new friend, "that's not at all *my* business, is it? Not at all in my line—oh, no!" He gathered up his hat, dress-suit case, and little umbrella from the floor where he had dropped them. "Be sure you don't follow me," he said, nodding pleasantly and winking at the children. Then he stepped to the door without so much as a look at the Gentleman Goose who called out angrily:

"Stop, stop! Catch 'em, Squealer—at 'em, Squawker—hold 'em, boys!"

It was too late. The boys were too much afraid of the Hare to do more than flutter and squawk a little, and as the Gentleman Goose did not seem inclined to make an attack single-handed, the Hare, with the children behind him, got to the door in safety. Peter, however,

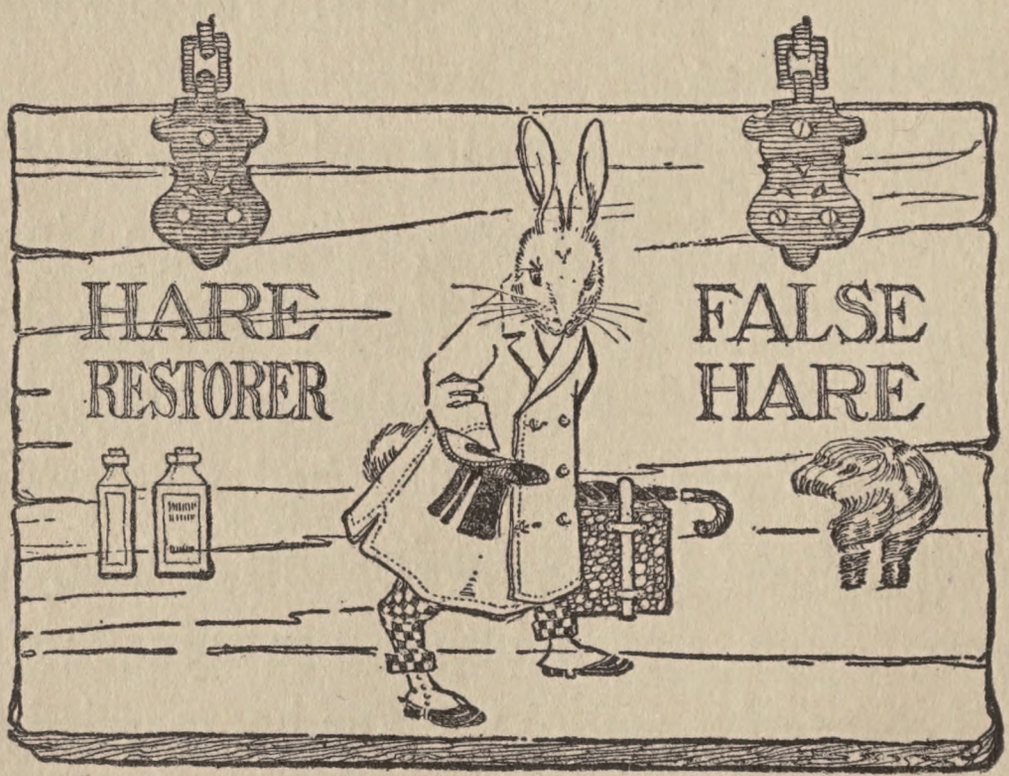
had to be dragged along by Ann and Rudolf, for the Lady Goose had just removed the great pot from the stove in time to prevent its contents from boiling over, and the little boy was sniffing hungrily at the steam. Now she came after the children carrying a large spoonful of the bubbling stuff. "All done, all done," she cried. "Don't go without a taste, dears."

"What's done?" asked Peter, eagerly turning back to her.

"Worms, dear; red ones and brown ones," answered the Lady Goose,—"boiled in vinegar, you know—just like mother used to make —with a wee bit of a grasshopper here and there for flavoring. Mother had the recipe handed down in her family—her side—you know, from my great-great-grandmother's half-sister who was a De l' Oie but married a Mr. Gans and was potted in the year—"

They got Peter through the door by main

force, Ann and Rudolf pushing behind and the Hare pulling in front. Even then, I am ashamed to say, Peter kept calling out that he would like "just a taste", and he didn't see why the Goose's worms wouldn't be just as good as the white kind cook sent up with cheese on the top!



CHAPTER IV

THE FALSE HARE

AS THEY hurried away from the Goose's house, the children cast one last look behind them. There at the window was the Lady Goose waving in farewell the spoon she had stirred the hot worms with. Suddenly a whirl of white feathers flew out of the chimney, the window and the door, which the children in their haste had left open behind them, and hid her completely from their sight. At the same instant two feeble shrieks came from within the house.

"Squealer and Squawker both went into the heap that time, I guess," said Rudolf.

"I'm glad of it!" Ann cried. *"I'd* never help either of the horrid little things out

again. Would you, sir?" she asked, turning politely to the Hare.

"I dare say not," he answered, yawning. "That is, of course, unless I had particularly promised *not* to. In that case I suppose I'd have to."

All three children looked very much puzzled.

"Would you mind telling us," asked Ann timidly, "what you meant when you said *this*" —and she touched her hair—"was not your business?"

"Not at all," said the Hare cheerfully. "I meant that it was."

"But you said—"

"Oh, what I *said* was, of course, untrue."

"Do you mean you tell stories?" Ann looked very much shocked, and so did the others.

"Certainly," said the Hare, "that's my business, I'm a False Hare, you know. Oh, dear,

yes, I tell heaps and heaps of stories, as many as I possibly can, only sometimes I forget and then something true will slip out of me. Oh, it's a hard life, it is, to be thoroughly untruthful every single day from the time you get up in the morning till the time you go to bed at night—round and round the clock, you know! No eight-hour day for me. Ah, it's a sad, sad life!" He sighed very mournfully, at the same time winking at Rudolf in such a funny way that the boy burst out laughing. "Take warning by me, young man," he continued solemnly, "and inquire very, *very* carefully concerning whatever business you go into. If I had known what the life of a False Hare really was, I doubt if I should have ever—But, dear me, this will never do—you're getting me into mischief! I've hardly done so much as a fib since we met."

"Oh, you mustn't mind *us*," said Rudolf,

trying hard not to laugh, as he and Ann and Peter marched along beside the False Hare. "You mustn't let us interfere with your—your business, you know. We sha'n't mind, at least we'll try not to. Whatever you say we'll believe just the opposite. It'll be as if he were a kind of game," he added to Ann who was still looking very doubtful. She looked happier at once, for Ann was quick at games and knew it.

"I think," said she to the False Hare, "that I heard something about you the other day—at least I suppose it must have been you. It was at a tea-party given by a friend of mine," —here Ann put on her most grown-up manner and made her voice sound as much like her mother's as possible—"a Mrs. Mackenzie who lives in the city. One lady said to another lady, 'How fashionable false hair is getting!' "

The False Hare stroked his whiskers to

hide a pleased smile. "Bless me," said he, "I should think so! Keeps a fellow on the jump, I can tell you—this social whirl. And then, when bedtime comes along and a chap ought to get a bit of rest after a day's hard fibbing, why then—there's the dream business. I can't neglect that."

The children did not understand and said so.

"Well," said the False Hare, "I'll just explain, and then I really must get back to business. Now then, suppose a hound dreams about a hare? It's a dream hare, isn't it?"

"Yes, of course," they cried.

"And a dream hare is not a real hare, is it? And a hare that's not a real hare is a false hare, isn't it? So there *I* am. That's where I come in. Simple, isn't it?"

"You make it sound simple," said Rudolf politely. "We're much obliged. And now would you mind telling us where we are com-

ing to, and what is beyond this steep hill just ahead of us?"

The Hare screwed his glass into his eye and looked thoughtfully at the country round about. "I can tell you, of course," he said, "but it won't be the truth. I really *must* get back to business."

"Oh, never mind telling us at all, then," said Rudolf, who was becoming rather vexed, "I see there's no use asking *you* any questions."

During their conversation with the False Hare, the children had been hurrying along over a stretch of open level country. Now the ground began to slope gradually upward and soon they were climbing a very steep hill. It was hard traveling, for the hill was covered with thick, fuzzy, whitish-yellow grass which tangled itself round their feet, and gave them more than one fall. Ann and Rudolf had to stop often to pick up Peter, for he was rather

fat and his legs were too short to carry him along as fast as theirs did. The False Hare hurried ahead by leaps and bounds that would soon have carried him out of sight of his companions if he had not stopped now and then to wait for them. When the children caught up to him, they would find him sitting on his little dress-suit case, smoking a chocolate cigarette, and laughing at them.

"Oh, don't mention it," he would say when they apologized for keeping him waiting. *"I* don't mind. I like waiting for slow-pokes! It's nothing to me if I miss a dozen appointments and get driven out of the dream business by that old what's-his-name—Welsh Rabbit!"

This sort of talk was rather annoying, and after a while the children decided not to heed it any longer. Indeed they were all three tired with their climb, and were glad to sink down on the soft fuzzy grass and rest a while. The

False Hare bounded ahead, calling back to them "Not to hurry", but when he found he could not tease them into following, he sauntered back to meet them, looking as cool and fresh and neat as when he started. Peter had been rather in the dumps ever since he had been refused a taste of the Lady Goose's dinner, and now he looked thoughtfully at the Hare's suit case.

"Has you got anything to eat in there?" he asked, his little face brightening.

"Gracious, yes," said the False Hare lightly. "Lemme see! What do little boys like best? Cinnamon buns an' chocolate cake an' butterscotch an' lemon pie an' soda-water an' gingerbread an' jujubes an' hokey-pokey an 'popcorn balls an'—" He might have gone on forever, but Ann and Rudolf would not stand any more of it. They rose angrily and dragging Peter after them, continued their climb. Just

as they had almost reached the top of the hill, the False Hare bounded past them with a laughing salute and a wave of his paw, and dropped out of sight over the brink of the ridge. A moment more and they all stood on the edge of a cliff so steep that they were in danger of tumbling over. From beneath the Hare's voice called up to them, "Nobody ever thought of a sheet of water—*oh,* no!"

Before their eyes lay the last thing the children had expected to see, a large piece of water quite calm and smooth, without a sign of a sail on it, nor were there any bathers or children playing on the narrow strip of beach directly beneath them. At first it seemed as if it would be impossible for them to climb down the face of that steep cliff to the water, but the False Hare had done it, and they determined that they must manage it somehow. After looking about carefully, they found a set of rude steps

cut in the side of the cliff. They were very far apart, to be sure, for climbers whose legs were not of the longest, but Rudolf helped Ann and Ann helped Peter and at last they were all safely down and standing beside the False Hare, who was strolling along the edge of the water.

"Hullo," said he, sticking his glass in his eye and looking at Ann. "What makes the whiskerless one so cheerful?"

Rudolf and Peter were not surprised when they turned to look at Ann to see that she was ready to cry.

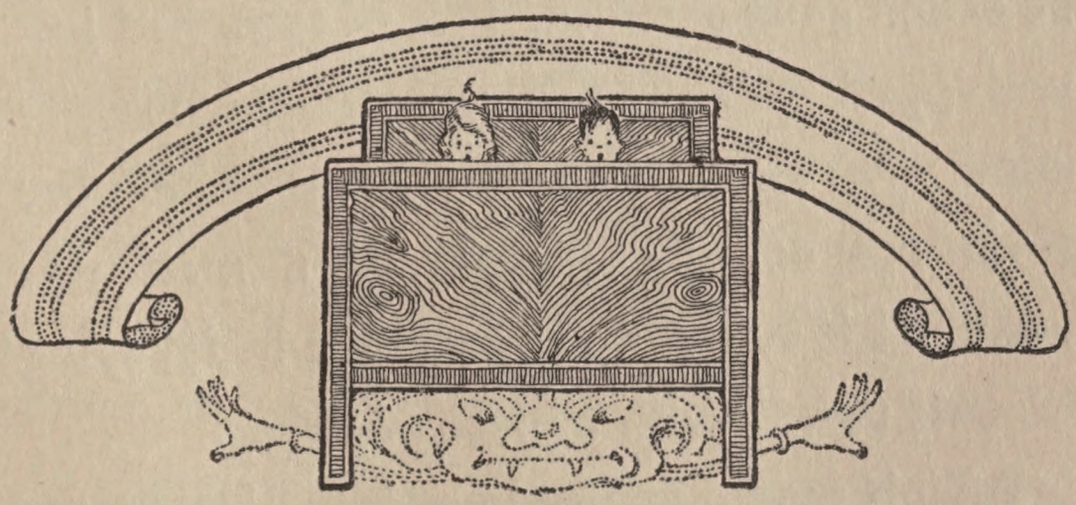
"What's the matter, Ann?" they asked.

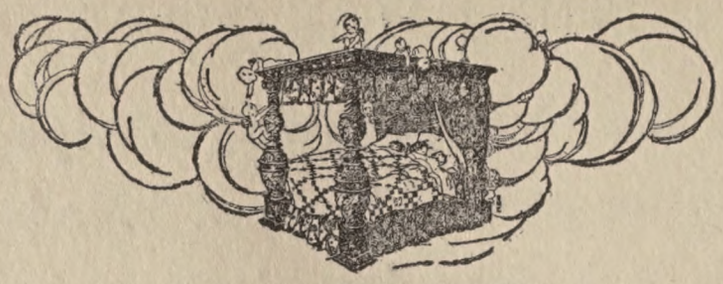
"Oh, dear, dear!" sighed Ann. "Whatever will become of us now? We can't go back. Even if we could climb up the cliff, I'd never pass that dreadful Goose's house again, no, not for anything! But how are we going to get any farther without a boat?"

The False Hare pretended to wipe away a tear with the back of his paw. "No boat," he groaned. "Oh, dear, dear, dear—no boat!"

The faces of the three children brightened immediately, for they were beginning to understand his ways. "Hurrah!" cried Rudolf, waving his sword.

Sure enough, coming round a bend in the shore where the bushes had hidden it from their sight, was a small boat rowed by two white candy mice.





CHAPTER V

REAL LIVE PIRATES

AFTER neatly and carefully turning up the bottoms of his trousers so that they should not get wet, the False Hare bounded on a rock that rose out of the water a few feet from shore, and stood ready to direct the landing of the boat. There was some sense in this, for certainly neither of the two mice was what could be called good oarsmen. One of them had just unshipped the little sail, and—not seeming to know what else to do with it—had cut it loose from the oar that served as a mast and wrapped it round and round his body, tying himself tightly with a piece of string.

Rudolf thought he had never in his life seen people in a boat do so many queer and unneces-

sary things in so short a time as those two mice did. They would stop rowing every few minutes and begin sweeping out the floor of their boat with a small broom, dusting seats, cushions, and oar-locks with a little feather duster tied with a pink ribbon. Then, after a few, rapid, nervous strokes at the oars, one or the other of them would pull his blade out of the water and polish it anxiously with his handkerchief, as if the important thing was to keep it dry. They would probably never have reached land that day if this had depended on their own efforts, but luckily the breeze was blowing them in the right direction.

All this time the False Hare had been waiting on the rock, and now as the boat was almost within reach, he began leaping up and down, clapping his paws and calling out in the heartiest tones: "Go it, my dear old Salts! Hurrah, my fine Jack Tars! You're a pair of

swell old sea-dogs, you are. Only don't *hurt* yourselves, you know. We wouldn't like to see you *work!*"

It seemed as if the white mice knew the False Hare and the value of his remarks, for they made no attempt to answer him, but only looked more and more frightened and uncomfortable. When their boat was at last beached, they jumped out of it, turned their backs to the rest of the party, and standing as close together as they could get, gazed anxiously out over the water. Seen close by there was something familiar about the look of these mice to the three children, yes, even though they *had* grown a great deal, and had disguised themselves by the simple method of licking the chocolate off each other! Rudolf and Ann hoped Peter would not notice it, but nothing of the sort ever escaped him. He walked around in front of the two mice, who tried vainly not to meet

his eye, looked at them long and earnestly, and said:

"I say, Mr. Mouses, was you always white?"

The mice turned a pale greenish color in their embarrassment and looked nervously at each other, but answered never a word.

"I thought," continued Peter, staring steadily at them, "that last time I saw you you was choc'late. Did you wash it off—on purpose?" he added sternly.

"Excuse me, sir, we don't believe in washing," muttered one of the poor things hastily.

Ann shook her head at Peter. "Hush!" she whispered. "You mustn't be rude to them when they are going to lend us their boat so kindly." Then she asked in a loud voice, hoping to change the subject: "Who is going to row? Will you, Mr. False Hare?"

"Why certainly, dearie, I adore rowing," said the False Hare sweetly.

"Then you will have to, Rudolf, and I will look after Peter. He is always *so* apt to fall out of a boat. I dare say the mice will be glad of a rest."

They all got into the boat, Rudolf took the oars, Ann sat in the bow with Peter beside her, and the False Hare settled himself comfortably in the stern with a mouse squeezed on either side of him. He wanted to pet them a little, so he said, but from the strained expressions on their faces and the startled squeaks they gave from time to time, it seemed as if they were hardly enjoying his attentions. The children loved being on the water better than anything else, and they would have been perfectly happy now, if the False Hare had not had quite so many nice compliments to make to Rudolf on his rowing, and if the white mice had not complained so bitterly of them all for "sitting all over the boat cush-

ions," and "wetting the nice dry oars!" They were enjoying themselves very much, in spite of this, when suddenly Ann, who had very sharp eyes, called out:

"Sail ahead!"

At first Rudolf thought she had said this just because it sounded well, but on turning his head he saw for himself a small boat heading toward them as fast as it could come. A moment more and the children could see the black flag floating at its masthead.

"Oh, oh!" screamed Ann, "that's a skull and cross-bones. It's a pirate ship!"

"Hurrah!" Rudolf shouted. "How awfully jolly! Just like a book."

"Dee-lightful!" the False Hare exclaimed, shuddering all over to the tips of his whiskers. "If there's one thing I do dote on it is pirates —dear old things!"

As for the two white mice, after one glance

at the ship, they gave two little shrieks and hid their faces in their paws.

Rudolf shipped his oars while he loosened his sword. "I shall be prepared to fight," said he, "though I am afraid we must make up our minds to being captured. Our enemy's boat is not so large—it's not much more than a cat-boat—but there are only four of us, as the mice don't count, and I suppose there must be at least a dozen of the pirates."

The False Hare smiled a sickly sort of smile. "And such nice ones," he murmured. "Such gentle, well-behaved, well-brought-up, *polite* pirates! Just the sort your dear parents would like to have you meet. *Those* fellows don't know anything about shooting, stabbing, mast-heading or plank-walking; *oh,* no! *They* don't do such things."

Ann turned pale at the False Hare's words, but Rudolf only laughed. "What luck!" he

exclaimed. "I'm nine years old and I've never seen a real live pirate, and goodness knows when I ever will again—I wouldn't miss this for anything." Then, as he saw how really worried his little sister looked, he added cheerfully. "They may sail right past without speaking to us, you know."

But this was not to be the case. Nearer and nearer came the pirate craft until at last the children could see, painted in black letters on her side, her name, *The Merry Mouser.* A group of pirates was gathered at the rail, staring at the rowboat through their glasses. There was no mistake about these fellows being pirates—that was easy enough to see from their queer bright-colored clothes and the number of weapons they carried, even if the ugly black flag had not been floating over their heads. At the bow stood he who was evidently the Pirate Chief. He was dressed in

some kind of tight gray and white striped suit with a red sash tied round his waist stuck full of shiny-barreled pistols and long bright-bladed knives. A red turban decorated his head and under it his brows met in the fiercest kind of frown. His arms were folded on his breast. As Rudolf looked at this fellow, he began to have the queerest feeling that somewhere—somehow—under very different conditions—he had seen the Pirate Chief before!

Just at that instant he heard the sound of a struggle behind him, and turning round he saw that Peter had become terribly excited. "Mittens! Mittens!" he screamed, and breaking loose from Ann's hold, he stood up and leaned so far over the side of the boat that he lost his balance and fell into the water. Ann screamed, the False Hare—I am ashamed to say—merely yawned and kept his paws in his pockets. Rudolf had kicked off his shoes and

was ready to jump in after Peter, when he saw that quick as a flash, on an order from their Chief, the pirates had lowered a long rope with something bobbing at the end of it. Peter when he came to the surface, seized this rope and was rapidly hauled on board the pirate ship.

Ann came near falling overboard herself in her excitement. "Oh, Ruddy, Ruddy!" she begged, "let's surrender right away quick. We can't leave poor darling Peter to be carried off by those terrible cats."

"Cats?" said Rudolf, staring stupidly at the pirates. "Why so they are cats, Ann! Somehow I hadn't noticed that before. But, look, they are sending a boat to us now."

In a small boat which had been towed behind the catboat, a couple of pirates—big, rough-looking fellows—were sculling rapidly toward the children. Cats indeed they were,

but such cats as Ann and Rudolf had never seen before, so big and black and bold were they, their teeth so sharp and white, their eyes so round and yellow! One had a red sash and one a green, and each carried knives and pistols enough to set up a shop.

"Surrender!" they cried in a businesslike kind of way as they laid hold of the bow of the rowboat, "or have your throats cut—just as you like, you know."

Of course the children didn't like, and then, as Ann said, they had to remember Peter. Much against his will, Rudolf was now forced to surrender his beloved sword. The False Hare handed over all his belongings—his jewelry, his suit case, and his little umbrella—without the slightest hesitation, humming a tune as he did so, but his voice cracked, and Ann and Rudolf noticed that the tip of his nose had turned quite pale. The prisoners

were quickly transferred to the other boat, and the pirate with the green sash took the oars. Just as all was ready for the start the cat in red cried:

"Hold on a minute, Growler! I'll just jump back into their old tub to see if we've left any vallybles behind!"

"All right, Prowler."

It was then and only then that Rudolf and Ann remembered the two white mice! The last time they had noticed them was at the moment of Peter's ducking when in their excitement, the foolish creatures had hidden their faces on each other's shoulders, rolled themselves into a kind of ball, and stowed themselves under a seat. Prowler leaped into the little boat which the pirates had fastened by a tow-rope to their own, and during his search he kept his back turned to his companions. He was gone but a moment, and when he returned

his whiskers were very shiny, and he was looking extremely jolly as he hummed a snatch of a pirate song.

"Find anything?" asked Growler, eying him suspiciously. "If you did, and don't fork it out before the Chief, *you'll* catch it. 'Twill be as much as your nine lives are worth!"

"Oh, 'twas nothing—nothing of any importance," answered Prowler airily.

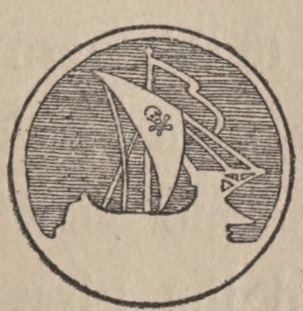
Rudolf and Ann looked at each other, but neither of them spoke. Both the pirate cats now settled to the oars and the boat skimmed along the water in the direction of the *Merry Mouser.* As they drew alongside, Growler muttered in a not unfriendly whisper:

"Look here, youngsters, here's a word of advice that may save you your skins. Don't show any cheek—not to me or Prowler, we're the mates—and above all, not to the Chief!"

"What is your Chief's name, Mr. Growler, dear sir?" asked Ann timidly.

Growler flashed his white teeth at her. Then he looked at Prowler and both mates repeated together as if they were saying a lesson: "The name of our illustrious Chief is Captain Mittens—Mittens, the Pitiless Pirate —Mittens, the Monster of the Main!"

"Why—why—my Aunt Jane had a tiger cat once with white paws—" Ann began, but then she stopped suddenly, for Rudolf had given her a sharp pinch. A terrible frown had spread over the faces of both Growler and Prowler. "Above *all,*" whispered the mate in low and earnest tones, "none of that! If you don't want to be keel-hauled, don't recall his shameful past!"



CHAPTER VI

ABOARD THE MERRY MOUSER

WHEN Rudolf and Ann and the False Hare, under guard of Growler and Prowler, reached the deck of the *Merry Mouser,* they found Peter, dressed in a dry suit of pirate clothing and looking none the worse for his wetting. He was being closely watched by a big Maltese pirate whose strong paw with its sharp claws outspread rested on his shoulder, but as Rudolf and Ann were led past him, he managed to whisper, "Look out! Mittens is awful cross at us!"

Foolish Ann paid no attention to this warning. She was so glad to see her Aunt Jane's pet again that she snatched her hand out of Prowler's paw, and ran toward the Pirate

Chief. "Kitty, Kitty, don't you know me?" she cried. "Oh, Puss, Puss!"

For a moment Captain Mittens stood perfectly silent, bristling to the very points of his whiskers with passion. Then he ordered in a hoarse kind of growl: "Bring the bags."

Instantly two ugly black and white spotted cats dived into the little cabin and brought out an armful of neat, black, cloth bags with drawing strings in them. "One moment," commanded Mittens in a very stern voice, "any plunder?"

Growler, the mate, bowed low before his chief. " 'Ere's a werry 'andsome weapon, sir," said he, handing over Rudolf's sword. "Nothing else on the little ones, sir, but *this* 'ere gentleman"—pointing to the False Hare—"was loaded down with jools."

Hearty cheers sprang from the furry throats of the crew, while broad grins spread over

their whiskered faces as they listened to this pleasing news.

"Silence," snarled Mittens—and every cat was still. "Now then," he commanded Growler, "hand 'em over."

Very much against his will, Growler emptied his pockets of the False Hare's jewelry and handed it over to his Chief. Mittens took the gold watch and chain, the flashing pin and studs, the beautiful diamond ring and put them all on, glaring defiantly at his crew as he did so. So fierce was that scowl of his, so sharp and white the teeth he flashed at them, so round and terrible his gleaming yellow eyes that not a cat dared object, though the faces of all plainly showed their anger and disappointment at this unfair division of the spoils.

"Now, what's in *there,*" demanded Mittens, as he gave a contemptuous kick to the False Hare's dress-suit case. Growler opened it and

took out a dozen paper collars, a little pair of pink paper pajamas, and a small black bottle labeled "Hare Restorer."

"All of 'em worth about two cents retail," snorted Mittens with a bitter look at the False Hare. "And that umbrella, I see, is not made to go up! Huh! Drowning's too good for *you!*"

"I feel so myself, sir," said the False Hare humbly. "You see," he added, wiping away a tear with the back of his paw, "I'm so *fond* of the water!"

Mittens thought a moment, keeping his eye firmly fastened on the Hare. "I'll fix you," he cried, "I'll tie you up in one of those bags!"

The False Hare put his paw behind his ear. "Bags?" said he. "Excuse me, sir, but did you say bags?"

"Yes, I did," roared the Pirate Chief. "Bags! Bags! Bags!"

"Oh, *thank* you!" cried the False Hare cheerily. "Just my favorite resting-place—a nice snug bag. Mind you have them draw the string *tight,* won't you?"

Mittens flew into a terrible passion. "I have it," he roared, "I'll send you adrift! Here, boys, get that boat ready!"

Then the Hare began to cry, to sob, to beg for mercy, till the children felt actually ashamed of him. "Look here, Mittens," Rudolf began.

"*Captain* Mittens," corrected the pirate coldly.

It was hard for Rudolf, but he dared not anger the pirate cat any further. "Don't hurt him, please, Captain Mittens," he begged. "He's only a—" Then he stopped, for the False Hare was making a terrible face at him behind the handkerchief with which he was pretending to wipe his eyes.

"Tie his paws!" commanded Mittens, without so much as a look at Rudolf. "There—that's a nice bit of string hanging out of his pocket—take that. Now—chuck him in the boat!"

In a trice the black and white spotted cats, who seemed to be common sailors, had tied the False Hare's paws behind him with his own string, lowered him into the mice's little boat from which they had already removed the oars, gave it a push, and sent him cruelly adrift!

"Oh, Rudolf," cried tender-hearted Ann, "what will become of him? Poor old Hare!"

"Po-o-o-r old Hare," came back a dismal echo from the little boat already some distance away. Then they saw that the False Hare had freed his paws—that string must have been made of paper like his clothes and his umbrella—and was standing up in his boat wav-

ing a gay farewell to all aboard the *Merry Mouser.*

"Good-by, kidlets!" he called in mocking tones. "Hope you have a good time with the tabbies!" And then to Mittens, "Good-by, old Whiskers!"

At this insult to their Chief all the pirate cats began firing their revolvers, but their aim must have been very poor indeed, as none of their shots came anywhere near the Hare's boat. Indeed, a great many of the cats had forgotten to load their weapons, though they kept snapping away at their triggers as if that did not matter in the slightest. The False Hare merely bowed, kissed his paw to Captain Mittens, and then began using his silk hat as a paddle so skilfully that in a few moments he was far beyond their range.

Growler edged up to Prowler. "I say, old

chap," he chuckled, "I s'pose that's what they mean by a hare-breadth escape?"

Prowler grinned. "It's one on the Chief, anyway," said he joyfully. "Not a breath of wind, ye know, not so much as a catspaw—no chance of a chase."

"What's that?" Captain Mittens had crept up behind the two mates and bawled in Prowler's ear. "What's that? No wind? Why not, I'd like to know? What d'ye mean by running out o' wind? Head her for Catnip Island this instant, or I'll have ye skinned!"

"Yes, sir, I'll do my best, sir," answered Prowler meekly. "But you see, sir, the breeze havin' died, sir, it'll be a tough job to get the *Merry Mouser*—"

"Prowler!" The chief, who had been standing close beside the unlucky mate while he spoke, now came closer yet and fixed his ter-

rible eye on Prowler's shining whiskers. "How long," he asked, speaking very slowly and distinctly, "is—it—since—you—have—tasted mouse?"

Prowler trembled all over. "A—a—week, sir," he mumbled, "that is, I couldn't *swear* to the date, sir, but 'twas at my aunt's and she never has us to tea on a Monday, for that's wash-day, nor on a Tuesday, for that's missionary, so it must 'a' been—"

"No use, 't won't work, Prowler." The Chief grinned and waved a paw to one of the spotted sailors. "Here, you, bring along the Cat-O'-Nine-Tails!"

At this the children were immediately very much interested, for they had never in their lives seen a cat with more than one tail.

"It would take nine times as much pulling—" Rudolf was whispering to Peter, when he noticed a new commotion among the sailors.

The black and white sea-cat had turned to carry out the Chief's order when suddenly some one called out "A breeze, a breeze!" and in the excitement of getting the *Merry Mouser* under way, the captain's attention was turned, and Prowler and his crime were forgotten.

All this time Ann and Rudolf and Peter had been standing a little apart from the rest under guard of the Maltese pirate at whose feet lay the dreadful black bags all ready for use. In the confusion Rudolf turned to Ann and whispered, "Do you suppose we could possibly stir up a mutiny? Prowler must be pretty sore against the Chief! If we could only get him and Growler on our side and make them help us seize Mittens and drop him overboard."

But Ann shook her head, and as for Peter he doubled up his little fists and cried out loud: "Nobody sha'n't touch my Mittens! I don't care if he *is* a pirate cat. I'm going to

ask my Aunt Jane if I can't take him home with me to Thirty-fourth Street!"

"Sh—sh!" Ann whispered, putting her hand over his mouth, but it was too late! Mittens had crept stealthily up behind Peter and now he popped one of the black bags over his head. At the same instant, Ann, kicking and struggling, vanished into another held open by two of the spotted cats, and before Rudolf could rush to her rescue a third bag descended over his own head. It was no use struggling, yet struggle they did, till Mittens sent three of the spotted sailors to sit on them, and *then* they soon quieted down. There were one or two small breathing holes in each bag, or else the children would surely have suffocated, so stout and heavy were those spotted cats. After what seemed to them a very long time a cry of "Land ho!" was raised, and the cats got up and rushed away to join in the general fuss and

confusion of getting the *Merry Mouser* ready for her landing.

Rudolf had been working his hardest at one of the holes in his bag and soon he was able to get a good view of his immediate surroundings.

"Cheer up!" he called to Ann and Peter. "We're coming close to the island."

"Has it got coral reefs and palm-trees and cocoanuts and savages, friendly ones, I mean?" came in muffled tones from Ann's bag.

"Has it got monkeys and serpents an' turtles an'—an'—shell-fish?" demanded Peter from his.

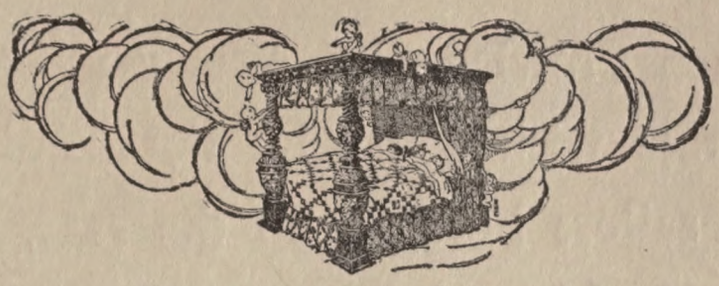
"N-no," said Rudolf, "I don't see any of those things *yet*. There are a great many trees, some of 'em coming most down to the edge of the water, but they're not palm-trees, they're willows, the kind you pick the little furry gray things off in early spring—"

"Pussy-willows, of course, stupid!" interrupted Ann.

"Yes, and back of that there are fields with tall reeds or grasses with brown tips to them."

"Cattails!" giggled Ann.

"And there's a big high cliff, too, with a little stream of water running down, and—" But here Rudolf stopped, for Growler and Prowler rushed up, cut the strings of the three bags, and released the children from their imprisonment. Hardly did they have time to stretch themselves before the *Merry Mouser* brought up alongside her landing-place, and in a moment more the children were being led ashore, each under guard of a cat pirate to prevent escape.



CHAPTER VII

CATNIP ISLAND

LITTLE cats, big cats, black, white, gray, yellow, striped, spotted, Maltese, tortoise-shell, calico, and tiger cats! Cats of all sizes and all kinds, cats of all ages, from tiny furry babies wheeled in perambulators by their mamas to gray old grandpas hobbling along by the aid of canes or crutches—all the cats of Catnip Island had trooped down to the shore to watch the landing of the *Merry Mouser*. Captain Mittens, decked out in the False Hare's jewelry, was the first to leave the pirate ship. He stepped along jauntily, nose in the air and the haughtiest kind of expression on his whiskered face. After him came Growler leading Ru-

dolf, then Prowler with Ann, then the Maltese pirate with Peter by the hand. The spotted sailors brought up the rear, all but two who had been left to guard the ship. As soon as the shore cats saw that their Chief had brought home three prisoners from his cruise, they set up a great yowl of joy, and began to dance, prancing and bounding in the air and whirling round and round upon their hind legs.

"Oh, my eye!" exclaimed Rudolf, quite forgetting where he was and standing still to watch their antics. "Don't I wish I had my sling shot!"

"Hush! Silence—'nless ye want to be skinned!" It was the voice of Prowler just behind him.

"If you think I'm afraid of a lot of silly cats—" began Rudolf, but his voice was drowned by the angry yowls that burst from

Captain Mittens was the first to leave the pirate ship.

a hundred furry throats as the islanders pressed closer and closer.

"Oh, Rudolf, do be quiet!" Ann begged, and Rudolf, remembering that he was not only a long way from his sling shot, but that even his sword had been taken away from him, was obliged to submit. By this time the pirates had cleared a way through the crowd and the procession left the beach and entered the pussy-willow grove which Rudolf had described from the deck of the *Merry Mouser.* Half hidden among the trees were a number of pretty little houses, each with a neat door yard and a high back fence. Each had its name, too, on a small door plate, and it amused Ann and Peter to spell out as they went along —"Furryfield," "Mousetail Manor," "Kittencote," etc.

"Oh, look," Ann whispered, "see the darling, little, front doors, Peter! Just like the

cat-hole in Aunt Jane's big door. The chimneys are shaped something like ears and the roofs are all covered with fur!"

"Yes," answered Peter, "and they've got little gardens to 'em, Ann. I guess that must be the catnip we smell so strong. I don't see any flowers, though, only big tall weeds, rows and rows of 'em—milkweed—that's what it is! What do you suppose they planted that for?"

Prowler, who was walking just ahead of Peter, overheard this last remark, and turning, fixed his large, round, yellow eyes on the little boy. "Don't you like milk, young man?" he asked.

"Why, yes," said Peter, very puzzled, "but not *that* kind, you know."

"Well, milk's milk these hard times," said Prowler, wagging his head. "It don't do to be too particerler. You like mice, don't you?" he continued.

"Why, *I* like candy mice," said Peter grinning, "but I never knew before that cats did!"

"Sh-sh!" Poor Prowler began to tremble all over and look anxiously about him. "Not a word of that," he murmured, "or I'm a dead cat! You keep mum about that little affair, young'un, and I'll do you a good turn yet, see if I don't!"

"All right; don't you forget!" whispered Peter.

The procession was now approaching a house considerably larger than any of the others and which had "The Pirattery" written in large letters over its door. Mittens led the way inside, the mates with the children and all the other pirates followed, together with as many of the island cats as could squeeze themselves in. The Pirattery, so the children were informed by Growler and Prowler, was an assembly hall or general meeting-place for the

pirates when on shore. Its floor and the little platform at one end were strewn with rat-skin rugs of the finest quality, and its walls were adorned with handsomely stuffed and mounted mouse and fish heads, snake skins, and other trophies of the chase.

Mittens now took up his position on the platform and began a long and eloquent speech in which he related the story of the capture of his prisoners, making the most absurd boasts of the terrible risks he had run, and dwelling most particularly on the awful fate of the False Hare—while quite forgetting to mention his escape. This speech was interrupted by tremendous cheers from the island cats which were only faintly joined in by the pirates. Mittens finished by saying that a concert in celebration of the victory would now be given, after which there would be refreshments—Peter pricked up his ears at the word!

—and then the plunder taken from the prisoners would be distributed among the officers and crew of the *Merry Mouser*. This last announcement was greeted by a volley of shrill and joyful yowls from the younger cat pirates, but Growler, frowning, whispered in Rudolf's ear:

"Don't you believe a word of that, about whacking up on the treasure! He'll never give up so much as a single shirt stud, he won't."

"I would 'a' liked them pink pajamas, I would," sighed Prowler. "They'd just suit my dark complexion."

"I can't understand," said Ann, "what it is that has made such a change in Mittens! Why, just yesterday when we got to Aunt Jane's he was asleep before the fire with a little red bow on his collar—just as soft and nice as anything, and he let us all take turns holding him!"

"He never scratched really *deep* all day," said Peter mournfully, "only when we dressed him up in the doll's clothes—he didn't seem to 'preciate that—an'—an' when I pulled his tail —he didn't *like* that, neither."

"He's a bad old thief, that's what he is!" exclaimed Rudolf, forgetting in his excitement to lower his voice. "And if we ever get back to Aunt Jane's and he's there, *I'll* fix him—"

A general warning hiss went up from the pirate cats who stood nearest to the children. "Be quiet," muttered Growler, "unless you want your ears bitten off? Don't you see the Chief is going to sing?"

Mittens had stepped to the front of the platform and was fixing an angry scowl upon the three children who stood between Growler and Prowler directly beneath him. When all was so quiet in the hall you could have heard a pin drop, the Chief cleared his throat and

nodded to the Maltese pirate who stood ready to accompany him upon the tambourine. In the background a semicircle of other singers clutched their music and shuffled their feet rather nervously as they waited to come in at the chorus.

Mittens sang in a high plaintive voice:

"When I was young, you know,
Not very long ago,
I was a mild, a happy Pussy-cat!
My fur was soft as silk,
I lived on bread and milk,
And I dozed away my days upon the mat!"

Chorus

("He was then a happy, happy Pussy-cat!")

"I really blush to say
How idly I would play
With my tail or silly spool upon the floor—
Till one unlucky day
Three children came to stay—
After that I wasn't happy any more."

Chorus

("No, *indeed,* he wasn't happy any more!")

"They drove me nearly wild,
My temper, once so mild,
They spoiled—the truth of that you'll say is plain—
So I ran away to sea—
'Tis a pirate's life for me,
And I'll never be a Pussy-cat again!"

Chorus

("No, *he'll* never be a Pussy-cat again!")

You may be sure that Rudolf and Ann did not join in the burst of applause which greeted the end of Captain Mittens' song. Peter would have been glad to, for he was too young and foolish to understand how really impertinent Mittens had been, but his brother and sister quickly stopped that. As for Growler and Prowler, they merely yawned, as if they had heard this song more than once before, only

faintly clapping their paws together in order not to attract the tyrant's attention to themselves. The next piece on the program, so Mittens announced, would be a duet between himself and Miss Tabitha Tortoise, entitled *Moonbeams on the Back Fence.* This selection proved so very noisy, so full of quavers, trills, and loud and piercing yowls, that the children decided it would be safe to attempt a little conversation.

"Oh, Rudolf," whispered Ann, "how shall we ever get away from here?"

"Don't want to get away," grumbled Peter. "We're going to have refreshments; Mittens said so."

"Nonsense; you'll have to go if we do," answered Rudolf. "But listen, what are the mates saying?"

The two black cat pirates were conversing excitedly under cover of the music, and pres-

ently the children heard what Prowler was whispering to Growler: "Look here, Matey, where's the rest of the swag, the suit case and *his* sword, you know?"

"On board ship, stowed away in Cap'n's cabin," answered Growler. "You don't mean to—"

"Yes, I do—I'm no 'fraid-cat—I mean to have them pink pajamas, or—"

"And where do *I* come in, eh?" exclaimed Growler indignantly.

"Oh, you can have the shirts and collars, Matey. Share and share alike, you know. We'll just slip off to the ship, and—"

"And take us with you," broke in Rudolf. "Do!"

"You know you promised to do us a good turn," whispered Ann. "And if you don't take us we'll tell, and we'll tell about what happened to the white mice, too—"

"And while you're about it," went on Rudolf, "you'd better take possession of the vessel. Between us we can easily manage those old spotties that were left on board. Then, don't you see, when you fellows are masters of the *Merry Mouser,* you'll have Mittens in your power and you can make him whack up on all the treasure!"

At this brilliant suggestion the two mates gave a smothered cheer, gazing at each other with their round yellow eyes full of joy and their whiskered mouths grinning so widely that the children could see their little red tongues and all their sharp white teeth.

"But how shall we get away without being seen?" Ann asked.

"Oh, that'll be all right," said Prowler, looking about him nervously. "Just wait till you hear 'em announce the refreshments—that always means a rush, you know. Then slip

through the crowd and out by that door behind the curtain, and hustle down to the ship just as fast as ever you can lay your paws to the ground!"

Prowler had hardly finished speaking before, with a final long-drawn piercing yowl, the duet of the Pirate Chief and Miss Tabitha Tortoise came to an end, and an intermission of ten minutes for refreshments was announced. From an inner room at the back of the hall a dozen or so white cats in caps and aprons trotted forth bearing large trays loaded with very curious-looking cat-eatables.

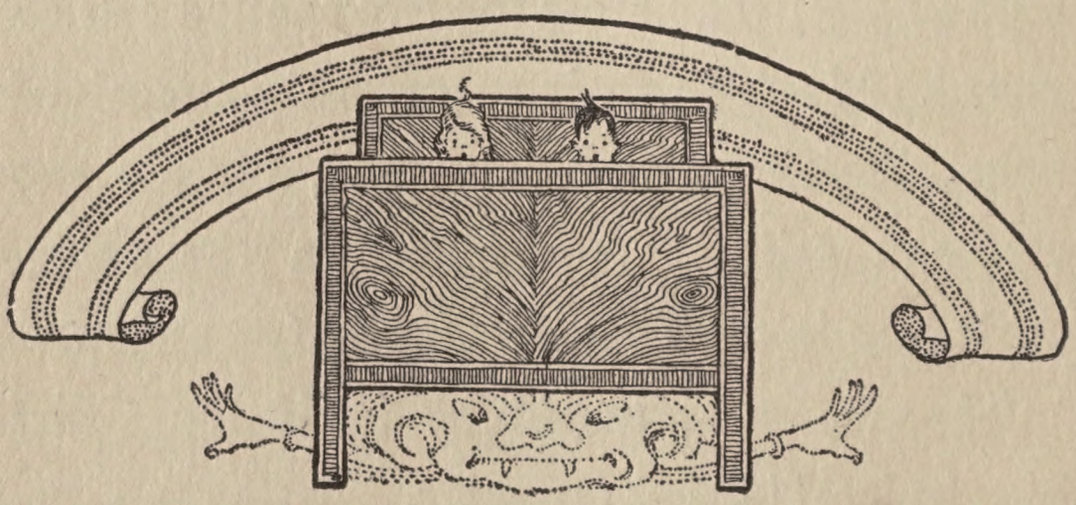
Rudolf and Ann had now their usual trouble with Peter who at first absolutely refused to budge until he had tasted at least "one of each". When at last he was made to understand that the trays around which the cats were so greedily thronging contained nothing more inviting than roasted rats and pickled fish fins, and that

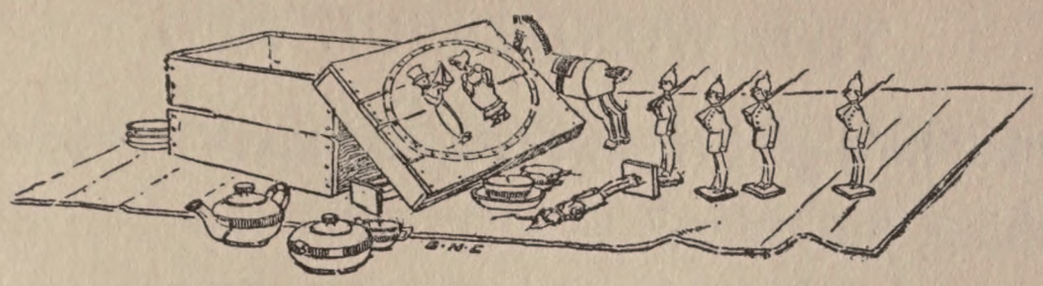
these delicacies would probably not be offered to prisoners anyway, he regretfully allowed himself to be pushed through a door at the side of the hall and hurried off in the direction of the shore. Although the children, followed closely by the two mates, had managed to slip away almost unnoticed in the general excitement, yet they knew their escape must soon be discovered and they ran as fast as ever they could go.

At last they reached the wharf and scrambled up the side of the *Merry Mouser,* expecting each instant to receive some kind of challenge from the two spotted cats on guard. Much to their surprise they received none. This was soon explained, for the two common sailors were found in the cabin, curled up in the Captain's bunk, fast asleep.

"A nice mess they'd be in if the Chief caught 'em!" cried Growler.

Prowler said nothing, but winked at his friend, and taking a piece of strong string from his pocket, he bound the poor spotted cats' eight paws all in a bunch together and left them to continue their nap. This little matter attended to, all hands now turned their attention to raising the sail, and by the time the advance-guard of cat pirates came rushing down through the pussy-willow grove in their pursuit, the *Merry Mouser,* borne along by a breeze that was something more than a cats-paw, was fast leaving the shores of Catnip Island behind her.





CHAPTER VIII

MUTINY ON BOARD

FOR some time the children leaned over the rail looking back at the group of cats gathered at the water's edge. The form of the Pirate Chief towered above them all as he ran up and down the beach yowling out all sorts of commands to which was paid very little attention by any one, and stopping every little while to flourish an angry paw in the direction of the *Merry Mouser.*

Peter regarded him sadly. "Poor old Mitts," he sighed, "it was an awful mean trick to play on him! He hasn't got any other boat and he looks so mad, I b'lieve he'd swim after us if he could."

"He could, all right," said Prowler gravely,

"but he'd get his paws wet, and that's a serious thing, you know."

Rudolf and Ann burst out laughing, and even Peter smiled, for it seemed to them a funny thing for a pirate to fuss about.

"Now," exclaimed Rudolf, as the breeze freshened and the forms of the cat pirates began to fade from sight, "there's a great deal to be attended to. What do you think we'd better get at first?"

"My pink pajamas!" cried Prowler, leaping in the air and turning a double somersault in his delight.

"My paper collars!" shouted Growler, following his example.

Rudolf was disgusted with the two mates for thinking of such nonsense at a time like this, but it was no use trying to do anything with them. They left the *Merry Mouser* to his management, and rushed below to bring

up the False Hare's suit case. When they returned they were followed by the two spotted sailors whom they introduced to the children as Toddles and Towser. Toddles and Towser were still very sleepy. They had managed to free themselves by chewing the string that bound their paws, but they did not seem at all disturbed by the change in affairs or inclined to make any trouble.

Rudolf placed them both at the wheel with stern directions to keep each other awake if possible. He then went below to see if he could find his sword before either Growler or Prowler should take a fancy to it. It was hanging up over Captain Mittens' berth, and under the Chief's pillow, neatly folded ready for the night, Rudolf found Peter's pajamas. As they were quite dry now, he called Peter and insisted on his putting them on, much against the little boy's

wishes, for hot and tight and furry as his borrowed suit had been, Peter had felt gloriously like a pirate in it! Very sulkily he followed his brother out of the cabin, but when the two had mounted to the deck Peter's sulks gave way to a burst of giggles at the sight of Growler and Prowler.

Ann was sitting on the deck quite weak with laughter, while the two mates, dressed in their stolen finery, paraded up and down in front of her. Prowler's pink pajamas were a better fit for him than Growler's paper collar which nearly concealed his pirate's nose, only the points of his whiskers and the tips of his black ears showing. Ann had added to his costume by the loan of her blue hair-ribbon which she had tied in a nice bow on the tip of his tail. But Prowler, if possible, looked even more silly than Growler, for he copied the actions of Captain Mittens as closely as he could,

folding his paws on his chest and scowling gloomily about him. He seemed extremely vexed when the children laughed, but they really could not help it, since a pirate in pink pajamas is not particularly dreadful. At last, after much coaxing, Rudolf got the whole party to sit down in a circle on the deck and consult with him on some plan of action.

"We *must* make up our minds," said he firmly, "on where we are going, and what is the nearest land, and what we are going to do when we get there, and who is in command of the *Merry Mouser,* anyway, and—"

Here he was interrupted by Prowler who said would he please go a little slower, for Rudolf was making his head ache and it reminded him of going to his aunt's to say his catechism.

"The thing ter do," drawled Growler sleepily, "is ter do nothin' 'tall till ye git some-

wheres where somethin's gotter be did, an' then like's not it's too late ter do anything an' all yer trouble's saved for ye!"

Rudolf did not think much of this as advice, but Prowler seemed delighted. "Hurrah, my hearties!" he shouted, and up he jumped, stood on his furry head on the deck, and waved his pink pajamaed legs in the air. "Now we can have our tea!" he cried.

The faces of the three children brightened at the pleasant thought of tea, and when the tray arrived, carried by Towser, Ann asked if she might pour.

"Paw away!" cried Prowler, grinning widely as he fixed his round yellow eyes on a small covered dish that Toddles had just set before him.

Ann lifted the cover of the tea-pot to peep inside but as she sniffed the steam an expres-

sion of disgust wrinkled up her little nose. "Ugh!" she cried, "it's catnip tea."

"Course it is," answered Prowler calmly. "Catnip tea and stewed mouses' tails—an' I asks what could anybody want nicer?"

"Little girls that don't like what's put before 'em can go without. Ever hear anything like that before?" asked Growler sweetly, and as he spoke he reached over and took the covered dish away from Prowler and helped himself to it largely.

"But we don't any of us like this kind of a tea!" cried Rudolf angrily.

"Then all the more for us that does," said Prowler, and he snatched the dish in his turn away from Growler and emptied all that was left of it on his own plate. Since there was nothing else for the children to do, they sat and watched the two mates eat, all of them

feeling decidedly cross, especially Peter. When every drop was finished and every crumb licked up, Growler said to Prowler, "Time for a nap, old boy," and without so much as a look in the children's direction the two rude fellows turned tail and marched off arm in arm to their bunks.

"Well, they *are* nice!" cried Ann. "And what are *we* going to do, I would like to know?"

"What we are going to do," said Rudolf thoughtfully, "is probably to be shipwrecked. Oh, not *right* away," he added quickly as he saw how frightened his little sister looked. "But there's land close ahead, as sure as sure can be, and, if I'm not much mistaken, Toddles and Towser have both gone to sleep at the wheel."

It was true. The two common sea-cats had left the wheel to take care of itself and had

curled themselves up in a soft round ball on the deck for a nap from which the children found it impossible to arouse them.

"I will try to steer and also mind the sheet, I think that's what it's called," said Rudolf, "but as I don't know *much* about sailing a boat except what I've read in books, and you and Peter don't know *anything,* I think the least we'll do will be to run her aground."

"Let's try to wake Growler and Prowler up," Ann begged. "They can't be sound asleep yet."

The two mates were not only sound asleep but snoring loudly. Ann and Peter tried shaking them, spanking them, even drenching them with the cold remains of the catnip tea, but it was all no use, they could not get them to stir. Meanwhile the *Merry Mouser* was drifting dangerously near land, in spite of all Rudolf could do to prevent her. He did sev-

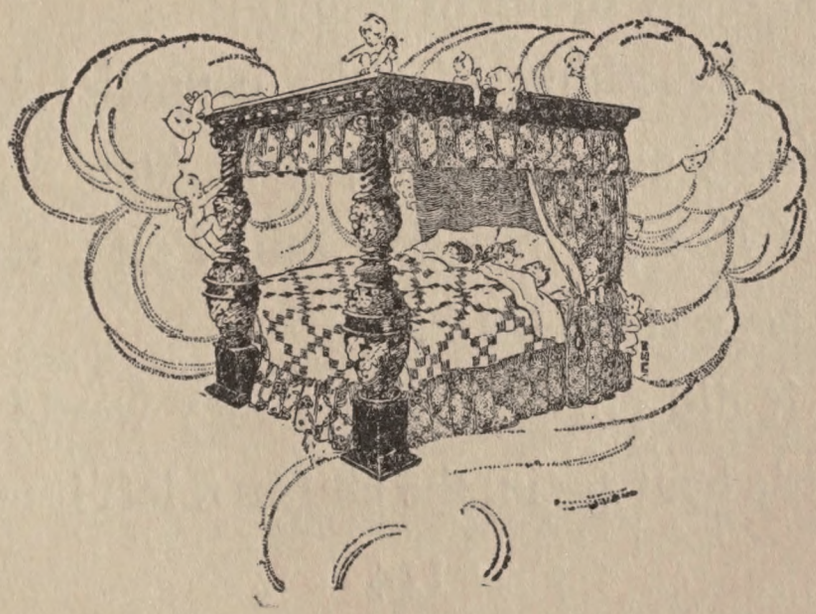
eral things and he ordered Peter and Ann to do a good many others, but all of them felt glad the False Hare was not there to compliment them on their seamanship. At last there came a dull shock and a jar, and the *Merry Mouser* ran her nose into a sand-bar, quivered all over, and then stood still.

"The thing to do *now*," said Rudolf easily, just as if he had planned it all, "is for us to get into the little boat we are towing and row ourselves ashore. Of course we must wake up the mates and the crew and take them with us."

It was simply astonishing the things those children had to do to Growler and Prowler before they could get either of them so much as to open an eye! When they were at last able to understand what had happened, they merely turned over and growled out: "Oh, is *that* all? Aground, are we? Ye needn't have waked us up for *that!* Be off as soon as ye like

and give us some rest—do!" They had hardly left off speaking before they were sound asleep again. As for Toddles and Towser they refused to wake at all.

The children left them where they lay and climbed over the side of the *Merry Mouser* into the little rowboat which Rudolf had brought alongside. When all were safely aboard, he cut loose the tow-rope, took the oars, and pulled away from the pirate ship. After a short and pleasant row they reached a gently shelving beach where it was not difficult to make a landing.



CHAPTER IX

CAPTAIN JINKS

ANN stood and stared at the line of low hills that fringed the edge of the water. "What funny, funny country!" she exclaimed. "It's like a checker-board going up-hill."

"No, it isn't either," said Rudolf, who loved to disagree, "because the squares are not square, they're all different shapes and sizes and they're not just red and black but ever and ever so many different colors."

"It's something like the countries in the geography maps, anyway," said Ann.

"It's like patchwork," said Peter, and he came nearest the truth.

As it did not seem likely they would need the little boat again, the children left it to float

away if it liked, and crossed the strip of gray sand to where they saw a little pink and white striped path winding up the side of a crimson hill. This path they began to follow, and it took them by so many twists and turns that they hardly noticed the climb. When the last loop brought them to the top of the slope they stood still and looked about them, surprised and delighted at the beauty of the bare bright hills that sloped away in front of them.

The ground under their feet was now a bright beautiful yellow, powdered all over with little white dots that proved to be daisies. With shouts of delight, Ann and Peter stooped to gather these, but Rudolf cried out: "Oh, look, look! Don't let's stop here. It's prettier yet farther on!" So on they ran, all three of them, over the yellow ground, over a stretch of green and blue checks, across a lavender meadow, and found

themselves at last in a wonderful pale blue field scattered all over with bunches of little pink roses.

"This is the prettiest yet," exclaimed Ann, "though of course it is very old-fashioned. I wonder what it reminds me of? Ruddy, do you remember that picture of Aunt Jane when she was little in such a funny dress with low neck and short sleeves—"

The children had been wandering across the field as Ann spoke, stopping to pull a rose here and there, too busy and too happy to notice where their feet were taking them. All at once they looked up and saw that they had come to the end of the pale blue field where it bordered on a broad brown road. Just ahead of them stood a little white tent, and from the door of the tent two tin soldiers suddenly sprang out, shouldered arms, and cried: "Halt!"

Of course the children halted. There was nothing else to do, so astonished were they to meet any one when they had supposed themselves to be in quite a wild and uninhabited country. Besides, though these were small and tinny-looking, yet soldiers are soldiers wherever you meet them, and have an air about them which makes people feel respectful. These two handled their little guns in a most businesslike manner. The taller of the two, who seemed by his uniform to be a superior officer, now stepped forward and snapped out: "Give the countersign!"

The children stood still and stared, Peter with his thumb in his mouth.

"We haven't got any, sir, so we can't give it to you," said Ann at last.

"Silly! He means *say* it," whispered Rudolf in her ear.

"We can't say it either," Ann went on, "be-

cause we don't know it. But we know lots of other things," she added, looking pleadingly at the officer. "Rudolf, he can say the whole of ' 'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse'—and I can say 'The Gentle Cow all Red and White I Love with all my Heart',—and Peter he says 'I have a Little Shadow',—he knows it all, every word!"

The little officer turned sharply to his companion. "Make a note of that, Sergeant," he snorted. "Head it, suspicious information: first prisoner, probably dangerous burglar burgling on Christmas eve; second prisoner, cattle thief; third prisoner—"

"But we aren't anything like that," broke in Rudolf hastily. "You're entirely mistaken, we—"

"Say what you are, then," snapped the officer, "and where you have come from and

where you are going and what you are going to do when you get there; say it, quick!" And raising his little gun, the officer pointed it straight at Rudolf's nose.

"We have come from Catnip Island where we were captured by the cat pirates," began Rudolf, stumbling over the words in his excitement, "and we—we don't know exactly where we are going, and we—we aren't doing exactly anything!"

"Aha!" The officer turned to his sergeant with a triumphant expression. "Just what I thought. Anybody that can't give a better account of himself than that had better be locked up. Spies—aha! Another of you came ashore a while ago—a glib-tongued, story-telling gentleman who fooled us into letting him off, but we've got *you* safe and sound and here you'll stay! Sergeant, arrest these spies!"

"Certainly, sir," said the sergeant, making

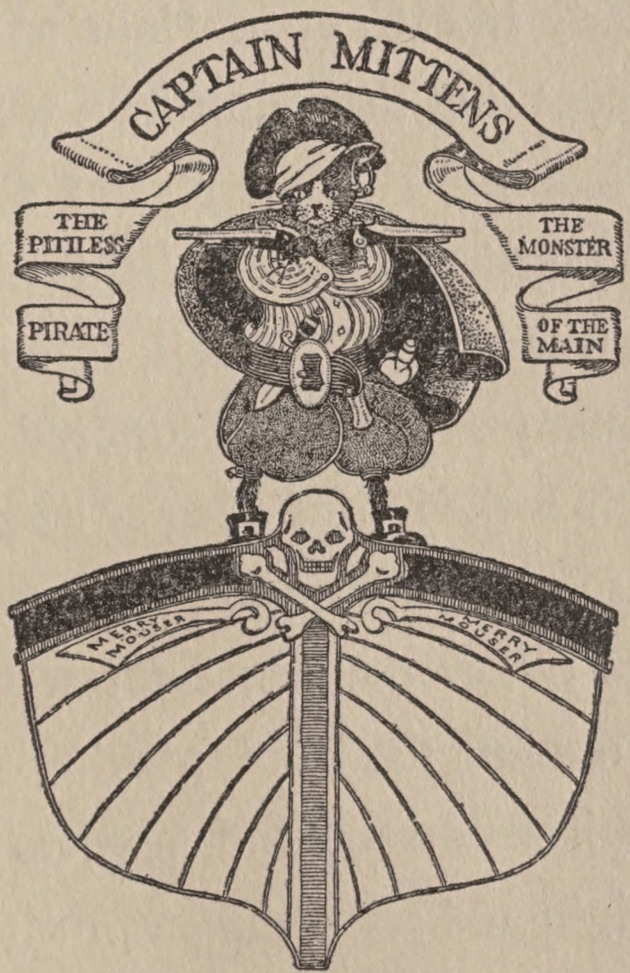
a note of it in his book, "but please, sir, how do they be spelled, Captain Jinks, sir?"

"S-p-i-s-e, spies, of course, idiot!" snapped the captain. "Now then, off with 'em. Separate cell for each prisoner, bars to the windows. Heavy chains on this gentleman in particeler," pointing to Rudolf. "Bread and water, on a Sunday. Off to the jail with 'em—march 'em along!"

"Beg pardon, sir," interrupted the sergeant who was glad of an excuse to stop at a very difficult bit of spelling. "We'll have to wait a bit. I hear the Queen's band playin'—"

"Then stand at attention and hold yourself answerable for the prisoners!" With this command, Captain Jinks faced about to the road, and stiffened all over till he looked like a little tin statue. For some time the children had been hearing the sound of music, at first faint and far-away, now growing louder and louder.

The sergeant pulled them hastily to the side of the road, and bade them in a gruff voice, "Keep quiet, or he'd settle 'em!" Then he, too, stiffened all over just as Captain Jinks had done, and both of them presented arms. The head of a procession was coming in sight.



CHAPTER X

MEETING A QUEEN

FIRST came a large company of soldiers almost exactly like Captain Jinks and the sergeant, except that their uniforms were a little shabbier-looking, and their arms a little less brightly polished. They held themselves stiffly and marched very well, in spite of the fact that many of them had suffered severe injuries, such as the loss of a leg or an arm at the least, in some former campaign, and all of them were rather the worse for wear. After the soldiers came the band, playing shrilly on their tiny instruments, and next, to the children's delight and astonishment, rolled a number of little carriages drawn by mechanical

horses. Rudolf was so keenly interested in the working of these mechanical horses, that he hardly noticed the fine ladies who sat stiffly on the cushioned seats of the carriages, very grandly dressed, and holding beautiful pink and blue parasols over their curled heads.

Suddenly Ann grabbed his arm and whispered: "Look, look! Did you see them? Marie-Louise and Angelina-Elfrida, my *own* dolls, and they never so much as bowed!"

"Perhaps they didn't know you," whispered Rudolf.

"They did, too," returned his sister angrily. "They just laughed and turned their heads the other way, horrid things! Just wait, I'll tell them what I think of them; but, oh, Rudolf, here come more carriages and more dolls in them, and how queerly they are dressed, these last, I mean! I never saw any dolls like them before. See their poke bonnets, and their

fringed mantles, and their little hoop-skirts, but, oh, look, *look,* can that be the Queen?"

Ann's voice sounded disappointed as well as surprised, and in her excitement she spoke so loud that Captain Jinks himself turned his threatening eye on her and called out: "Silence!" But Ann paid no attention to him, nor did the other children; the eyes of all three were fixed upon a little figure who rode all alone at the very end of the procession. They knew she must be the Queen by the respectful way in which Captain Jinks and the sergeant saluted, but she was very different from what they had imagined a Queen to be. The wooden horse which she rode was not handsome, indeed one of his legs was missing, but he pranced and curvetted so proudly upon the remaining three that it seemed as if he knew he carried a Queen upon his back. The royal lady kept her seat with perfect ease, and when she

came opposite the children, she checked her steed, halted, and gazed down upon them.

"Have you forgotten me?" she said. Then she smiled and they knew her at once. It was the corn-cob doll! Though she had grown so much larger and seemed so much grander, yet she looked just the same as when they had taken her out of Aunt Jane's sandal-wood box from which, the children now remembered, certain tin soldiers and a three-legged wooden horse had also come! The Queen still wore her flowing greeny-yellow gown, her hair was braided in two long braids that hung over her shoulders, and she carried her quaint little head high, in truly royal fashion.

Now she dismounted gracefully from her horse and came toward the children, holding out her hand. They dared not look her in the face. They were all three ashamed to speak to her, and especially Rudolf who remembered

only too clearly all the unkind things he had said about the corn-cob doll, and how very, very near he had come to roasting her over the nursery fire! Whatever would happen, thought he, if any of her subjects who seemed to stand in such awe of her, should find out that attempt on their Queen's life? Captain Jinks would probably think imprisonment on bread and water entirely too good for him, probably it would be slow torture.

"Answer her majesty," muttered the captain in his ear, "or I'll have your head cut off!"

Still Rudolf, blushing fiery red, and not knowing what to say, continued to stare down at his toes. Peter put his thumb in his mouth, Ann hung down her head; neither of them was any better off.

The little tin captain stepped eagerly forward. "Shall I give orders to prepare for the execution, your Majesty?" he began, in a voice

full of pleased excitement. "These suspicious persons are already under arrest. They would furnish very excellent targets for the artillery practise? If it should please your Majesty to offer a prize for the best shot? Or, if your Majesty is in a *hurry,* now, a nice dip in boiling oil would finish them off very neatly!"

"Be quiet, Jinks," said the Queen frowning. "You talk so much I can't think. If it wasn't for those tiresome revolutions in my capital city, I believe I'd banish you. Let me see, how many of them have you suppressed for me?"

"Exactly twelve, your Majesty," answered Jinks with a low bow, "and I beg to announce that we are at this moment on the brink of the thirteenth—baker's dozen, your Majesty."

"Oh, it's the baker this time, is it?" asked the Queen with a sigh. "What's the matter with *him,* Jinks?"

"Same old trouble, your Majesty. Your

court, those doll ladies in particular, have become so haughty—"

"Naughty, you mean, Jinks," corrected the Queen.

"So haughty *and* naughty, your Majesty, that they've absolutely refused to eat their crusts. Did anybody, I ask your Majesty, ever hear the likes of that?"

There was a moment's silence. The Queen shook her head. The children tried to appear at their ease, but they were not. Ann looked particularly uncomfortable. She was not fond of her crusts.

"Well, go on, Jinks, what else?" said the Queen.

"Well, your Majesty, this keeps the baker busy day and night baking 'em bread, not to speak of the cakes and pies, and he says he feels he hadn't orter stand it any longer. He's going to strike. As for the populace, your

Majesty, they only get the stale loaves or none at all, and they're wild, your Majesty, very wild indeed."

"I suppose they are, Jinks," sighed the Queen.

"And the worst of it is, your Majesty, we're very short of soldiers. The Commander-in-Chief"—both Jinks and the sergeant drew themselves up and saluted at the name—"has taken a whole company to the seaboard for to repel the cat pirates, and very fierce them pirates are, I've heard tell. We may have to send him reinforcements at any time."

"The Commander-in-Chief, Jinks," said the Queen haughtily, "is a great general. He will manage the pirates and the baker, too, if you can't do it. And if the worst should come to the worst before he gets back, why I'll just abdicate, that's all, and the baker can be king and much good may it do him." She turned to

the children and smiled at them. "Now," she said, "you shall come with me and I will show you where I used to live before I was a Queen."

The corn-cob doll waved her hand, gave an order, and immediately the carriage in which sat Marie-Louise and Angelina-Elfrida was turned and driven back to where the children stood.

"These ladies will enjoy a walk," said the Queen.

Very sulkily the two elegant doll-ladies got out of their carriage, not daring to disobey, and passed by Ann, noses in the air, without so much as a nod.

"Never mind them, dears," said the Queen kindly. "They don't know any better. Now jump in!"

The children obeyed, hardly able to believe in their good luck, and in another moment,

much to the surprise and indignation of Captain Jinks, they were rolling away from him, the Queen riding close beside their carriage.

"You are safe now," said she, "at least until the revolution begins. If Jinks should fire his cannon, that's a sign it's starting, but don't worry"—as she saw that the children were looking rather alarmed—"I dare say it will blow over without a battle. And now I want you to look about you, for I don't think you have ever seen anything like this before."

They had not indeed, and as their shyness wore off, the children began to ask the Queen a great many questions. Was this her capital city they were coming to? Were those the stores where all the dolls' clothes in the world came from? Was it real water in the little fountain playing in the middle of the square? All this time they were being carried swiftly through the streets of the

neatest, prettiest, little, toy town any one could wish to see. Both sides of the main street were lined with little shops, and as the children leaned out of the carriage for a brief glimpse into their glittering windows, they saw sights that made them long to stop and look more closely.

There were clothing shops, shoe shops, candy shops, a very grand-looking milliner's establishment where the children were amused to catch a glimpse of Angelina-Elfrida and Marie-Louise trying on hats, and a gaily decorated doll theater where a crowd of dolls were pushing their way in to see a Punch and Judy show. There were markets where busy customers thronged to buy all sorts and kinds of doll eatables, turkeys and chickens the size of sparrows and humming-birds, yellow pumpkins as big as walnuts, red-cheeked apples like cranberries, cabbages fully as large

as the end of your thumb, and freshly baked pies as big around as a penny.

Peter's eyes nearly popped out of his head as he passed all these good things without hope of sampling any of them! The last shop they passed was that of the royal baker, and they noticed that its windows were boarded up, while a crowd of common dolls stood about in front of the door, muttering angrily.

But now the business part of the town was left behind, and the children were being driven through street after street of gaily painted, neatly built, little houses with gardens full of tiny bright-colored flowers, stables, garages—everything complete that the heart of the most exacting doll in the world could desire. Ann and Peter were quite wild about it all, and even Rudolf condescended to admire. Now the houses were left behind and they entered a little park, where tiny artificial

lakes glittered and stiff little trees were set about on the bright green grass. In the center of this park stood the doll palace. It was pure white, finished in gold, and had real glass windows in it, and white marble steps leading up to it, and high gilded gates where a guard of soldiers turned out to present arms, and a band was beginning to play. The rest of the procession turned in at the gates of the palace, but rather to the children's disappointment, the Queen gave their coachman orders to drive on.

"You may see my palace afterward, if we have time," she said, "but I want to take you first of all to see my dear old home where I used to live when I was a girl, when the little mother took care of me."

The children looked at one another. Then Peter said boldly: "Was that when you were

Aunt Jane's doll? You weren't a Queen *then,* were you?"

"No, indeed," answered her majesty, smiling. "I was just an ugly little doll, the happiest, best-loved little doll in all the world, and with the dearest little mother. But here we are, and you shall see for yourself what a snug home I had."

The old doll house looked neat enough from the outside, to be sure, but I am afraid if the children had run across it in the attic at Aunt Jane's they would have taken it for a couple of large packing-boxes set one upon the other. Once inside, however, they forgot how impatient they had been to see the palace and its gorgeous furnishings, they were so interested and amused by the homely furnishings and neat little arrangements so proudly displayed to them by the Corn-cob Queen.

She led the children through one room after another, explaining each thing as they passed it. Those little muslin curtains at the windows, the little mother had hemmed them all herself. It was she who had made that wonderful cradle out of cardboard, with sheets from a pair of grandfather's old pocket-handkerchiefs, she who had pieced that tiniest of tiny patchwork quilts! In the kitchen that neat set of pots and pans made from acorns and the shells of walnuts was the work of her hands, assisted, perhaps, by the penknife of a certain little boy. That blue and white tea-set on the pantry shelves—the children recognized it at once as having come out of the sandal-wood box—why it was almost worn out from the number of cups of tea the old doll and her little mother had taken together in the good old days!

"It's just the dearest little house in the

world," sighed Ann, when, after having seen and admired everything to their heart's content, they took their places in the carriage again, "and we don't wonder you love it! The things that come straight from the toy shops are not really half so nice as the things you fix yourself—we understand now. But I suppose," she added thoughtfully, "you find it much grander being a Queen?"

"Grander, perhaps," sighed the corn-cob doll, "but a great deal more of a nuisance. However—"

Just then the pop of a toy cannon interrupted the Queen's speech. They had driven back almost to the palace, and could see a crowd of common dolls of all kinds and sizes gathering on the green in front of the gilded gates. At the same moment a troop of soldiers, headed by the little tin captain, came running from the direction of the town evidently with

the intention of putting a stop to the disturbance.

"The revolution," said the Queen calmly, "just as I expected. Now I am afraid I shall have to send you out of town."

"But why?" Rudolf began in his arguing voice. "We don't *want* to go. We want to stay and fight on your side, and I'm sure we'd be very useful! Why I'd just as lief command your army as not, and—"

"Thank you very much," said the Corn-cob Queen, "but what would Captain Jinks say to that? He is in command, you know. And if he *should* fail me, why the Commander-in-Chief will soon be back from capturing the cat pirates."

"Who is this fellow you call the Commander-in-Chief, anyway?" Rudolf interrupted crossly.

The Queen looked him straight in the eye.

"I hope," she said, "that you may all be allowed to see him some day, if you are good. He is a *great* soldier. He never sulks, and always obeys without asking questions. That is more than some little boys do." Rudolf hung his head, and the Queen added hastily: "But now I see that Captain Jinks and the baker are going to hold a conference. I must go and join them. Your coachman will drive you out of town the back way. Now where would you like to go?"

"Back to our Aunt Jane, please," said Ann quickly. "Can you tell us the way?"

"No," said the Queen, "I mustn't, but I have a friend who is a dream-keeper just over the border, and I think he may be able to help you. I'll tell the coachman to drive you there. Now good-by!"

"Good-by, good-by!" called the children. The coachman touched up the horses, they

were whirled away in a cloud of dust through which they looked back regretfully at the queenly figure on the little wooden horse who waved her hand again and again in kindly farewell. They saw her joined by Captain Jinks and by a stout person in a white cap and apron who handed the Queen what seemed to be some kind of document printed upon a large sheet of pie crust.

"That was the Baker, I guess," said Rudolf, "and I dare say what he was handing her was the declaration of war! Oh, what a shame it is we are going to miss all the fun!"

"And the refreshments," sighed Peter. "We *always* do! I never did taste a declarashun of war, but it looked awful good. The very next time I see one, I'm going to—"

But what Peter was going to do Ann and Rudolf did not hear, for at that moment they were all three nearly spilled out of the little

carriage by the furious rate at which their driver turned a corner. They had left the dolls' city far behind them and were out on the long brown road that led past the little tent where the children had been arrested by Jinks and the sergeant. Now they were out in the open country hurrying past the wonderful bright-colored plains, past fields of pink and purple, blue and green and yellow, white and scarlet, faster and faster all the time, the horses rushing along with such curious irregular jerks and bounds that it was almost impossible for the children to keep their seats, and they expected at each moment to be dumped in the middle of the road.

"Look out!" shouted Rudolf to the coachman. "Don't you see you are going to upset us?"

The coachman was a very grand-looking person in a white and gold livery. He never

even turned his powdered head as he shouted back:

"Didn't have no—or-ders—not—to!" And for some time they tore on faster than ever.

At last Ann leaned forward and caught hold of one of the coachman's little gold-embroidered coat tails. "Oh, do take care," she cried, "you might run somebody down!"

"That's it,"—the coachman's voice sounded faint and jerky, and the children could hardly catch the words that floated back to them: "Running—down—run-ing—down! As—fast—as—ev-er—I—can. Most—com-pli-cated—insides—in—all—the—king-dom. Can't—be—wound—up—not—by—likes—of—you—"

The horses were no longer galloping, now they were slowing up, now they stopped, but with such a sudden jerk that all three children were tumbled out into the road. They had been expecting this to happen for so long that

the thing was not such a shock after all, and somehow they landed without being hurt in the slightest. They picked themselves up, and saw the little carriage standing at the side of the road, the horses perfectly motionless, each with a forefoot raised in the air, the coachman stiff and still upon his box, gazing straight in front of him.

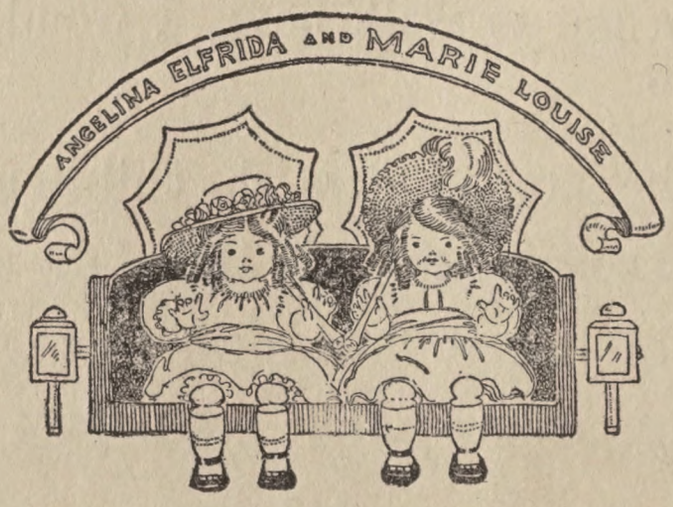
"He'll stay like that," said Peter mournfully, rubbing the dust from his knees, "till he's wound up again. I wish we had the key!"

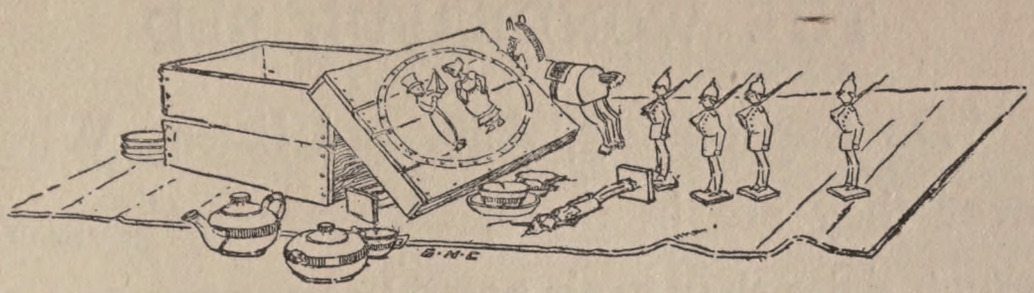
"I wish we did," said Rudolf crossly. "You know what Betsy says about—'If wishes were horses, beggars could ride'—well, they aren't, so we've got to walk now. I wonder where we are?"

Looking around them, the children saw that they had come to the very last of the many colored fields, where the brown road ended in a stretch of creamy-yellow grass. Just beyond a

thick woods began, but was divided from the creamy field by a broad bright strip of color, like a long flower bed planted with flowers of all kinds and colors set in all sorts of different patterns — stars, triangles, diamonds, and squares.

"That's the border," shouted Ann, "and over there somewhere we'll find the person the Queen said would help us get back to Aunt Jane. Come on!" As she spoke she bounded off across the field, the two boys after her, and in less time than it takes to tell it they had run through the tall yellow grass, jumped the border, and stood upon the edge of the wood.





CHAPTER XI

THE GOOD DREAMS

A THIN screen of bushes was all that hid from the children's eyes the people whose voices they could hear so plainly.

"Maybe it's some kind of picnic they're having in there," cried Peter, pushing eagerly forward. "Come on quick!"

"No, you don't, either," whispered Rudolf, catching him and holding him back. "Don't let's get caught this time, let's peep through first and see what the people are like."

"Yes, do let's be careful," pleaded Ann. "We don't want to get arrested again, it's not a bit nice—though I suppose if this is where the Queen's friend lives, it isn't likely anything so horrid will happen to us."

"Do stop talking, Ann, and listen. Whoever they are in there, they are making so much noise they can't possibly hear me, so I'm going to creep into those bushes and see what I can see."

As he spoke Ruldolf carefully parted the bushes at a spot where they were thin and peeped between the leaves, Ann and Peter crowding each other to see over his shoulder. They looked into a kind of open glade not much larger than a good-sized room and walled on all sides by tall trees and thick underbrush. It had a flooring of soft green turf, and about in the middle lay a great rock as large as a playhouse. This rock was all covered over with moss and lichens, and the strange thing about it was that a neat door had been cut in its side. Before this door, talking and waving his hands to the crowd that thronged about him, stood a man—the queer-

est little man the children had ever seen! He looked like a collection of stout sacks stuffed very tightly and tied firmly at the necks. One sack made his head, another larger one his body, four more his arms and legs. His broad face, though rather dull, wore a good-humored expression, and he smiled as he looked about him.

A pile of empty sacking-bags lay on the ground beside him, and from time to time he caught up one of these, ran his eye over the crowd, chose one of them, and popped him, or it, as it happened to be, into the sack which he then swung on his shoulder and heaved into the open doorway in the big rock, where it disappeared from sight. He would then taken another sack and make a fresh selection, looking about him all the while with sleepy good humor, and paying little if any attention to the cries, questions,

and complaints with which he was attacked on all sides.

What a funny lot they were—this crowd that surrounded the little man! The children could hardly smother their excitement at the sight of them. Not people or animals only were they, but all kinds of odd objects also, such as no one could expect to see running about loose. A Birthday Cake was there, with lighted candles; a little pile of neatly darned socks and stockings, a white-cotton Easter Rabbit with pink pasteboard ears, a Jolly Santa Claus, a smoking hot Dinner, a Nice Nurse who rocked a smiling baby, a brown-faced grinning Organ-Man, his organ strapped before him, his Monkey on his shoulder. There were too many by far for the children to take in all at once, but at the sight of one particular member of the crowd, the children gasped with astonishment; and

Peter's excitement nearly betrayed them. There, lounging by the side of a mild-faced School-Mistress Person, still smoking his chocolate cigarette, was—the False Hare!

"Look alive now!" the little man was crying out. "Who's next, who's next?"

"Me, me, me—take me next, Sandy!" A dozen little voices cried this at one and the same time. There was a scramble, bursts of laughter, followed by a sharp rebuke from Sandy. "No, you don't either. Stand back, you small fry. No shoving!"

When Peter had seen and recognized the False Hare he had been so excited that it had been almost impossible for Rudolf and Ann to keep him quiet. Now, as he watched the scramble and the rush and the fuss the funny crowd was making about the little man, he laughed out so loud that it was too late even to pinch him. The children's presence was

discovered, and two, tall, silver candlesticks jumped from a satin-lined box and ran to draw them into the middle of the glade. Sandy, as the little man appeared to be called, paused in his business, turned round, and smiled at the children.

"Now then," said he, "what are you doing here? Don't you know this is my busy night? Who are you, anyway? Not on my list, I'll warrant. Who's dreams are you?"

"Nobody's," began Rudolf. "The Corn-cob Queen sent us to see if you could tell us any way to get back to our Aunt Jane—"

"Nobody's?" interrupted the little man. "Did you say you were Nobody's dreams? Don't see him in the N's." And he took a printed list out of his pocket and ran his eye anxiously over it. "Are you sure—"

"Please, he means we're not dreams," said Ann, stepping forward, "at least we don't

think so." She hesitated a second and then added: "It depends on what happens to them. Are these all dreams?"

"All perfectly Good Dreams, or my name's not Sandman," answered the baggy fellow briskly. "We don't handle the Bad Ones here, not us!"

Peter looked interested. "Where does the Bad Ones live?" he asked. "I wants to see them."

The Sandman shook his head at Peter. "Oh, no, you don't, little boy," he said. "No, you don't! Don't you go meddling in their direction or you'll get into trouble, take my word for it. They live way off in the woods and they're a bad lot. They've got a worse boss than old Sandy! No, no;—the good kind are trouble enough for me. What with the hurry and the flurry and the general mix-up, something a little off color will slip in now

and then. Everybody makes mistakes *sometimes!*"

As he made this last remark Sandy cast a doubtful look at the False Hare, who grinned and tipped his silk hat to him.

"I told Sandy *all* about myself," said the False Hare, winking at the children. "I told him I was just as good as I could be!"

The children could not help laughing. "I'm afraid you don't know him as well as we do, Mr. Sandy," said Ann.

"Oh, I know about as much as I want to know about him," said Sandy, pretending to frown very fiercely. "I've almost made up my mind to get rid of him, but the truth is I don't really know just where he belongs."

"Doesn't matter to *me* whether I spend the night with a bald-headed old gentleman or a bird-dog—all the same to *me,*" said the False Hare meekly. This speech sounded so like

him that the children looked at one another and burst out laughing again, at which the False Hare gave a kind of solemn wink, sighed, and touched his eyes with a little paper handkerchief he held gracefully in one paw.

The Sandman turned his back on the silly fellow, and went on with his explanations to the children: "We have a very select set of customers," he said, "and it's our aim to supply 'em with the finest line of goods on the market. Wears me to a frazzle sometimes, this business does," he stopped to wipe from his brow a tiny stream of sand that was trickling down it, "but I've got to keep at it! All the folks, big and little, like Good Dreams, and want 'em every night, and if they get mixed up or the quality's inferior, or there's not enough to go around, I tell you what, it makes trouble for Sandy! But just step a

little nearer, and you shall see for yourselves how the whole thing is managed."

The children followed Sandy, who walked back to the pile of empty sacks, picked one up, compared the label on it with a name on his list, and called out in a loud voice: "Mrs. Patrick O'Flynn, Wash Lady—excellent character—never misses on a Monday—six children—husband not altogether satisfactory. Here, now, Noddy—Blink! I'll want some help, boys."

As he called out these two names, two very fat, sleepy boys, looking like pillows with strings tied round their waists, slouched from behind the rock where they had been waiting, and stood sulkily at attention. There was a scramble and a rush and a fuss among the Good Dreams, just as there had been before when the children first peeped into the glade, each one struggling and pushing and

crowding to get ahead of the next, without any regard as to whether or not it was wanted. It took a tremendous effort on the part of Sandy, together with all the help the sleepy sulky boys would give, to get the right collection of dreams into the Wash Lady's sack, and to keep the wrong ones out.

"Letter from the Old Country," Sandy cried. "That's it, boys, more lively there. Tell that Pound of Tea to step up—No, no pink silk stockings to-day, thank you. Tell that Landlord the rent's paid, I'll let him know when he's wanted. Hand over that pile of mended clothing—and the pay envelope, mind it's the right amount—all the rest of you, step aside!" Waving away a gay bonnet with a bird on it, a bottle marked "Patent Medicine," and the persistent pink stockings, the Sandman closed the mouth of Mrs. O'Flynn's sack, and swung it on his shoulder,

nodding to the children to watch what would happen. Much excited, they crowded round the open door in the side of the big rock and peered down into what seemed to be a kind of dark well with a toboggan-slide descending into it. Sandy placed the Wash Lady's sack at the top of the slide, and before the children could so much as wink, it had slid off into the darkness and disappeared from sight.

"Oh, my!" cried Ann, "Is it a shoot-the-chutes? Does it bump when it gets there?"

"No, no," said the Sandman. "No bumps whatsoever, the most comfortable kind of traveling I know, in fact you're there the same time you start, and I'd like to know how you can beat that? I ought to know, for I use this route myself on my rounds a little earlier in the evening." He walked back to his pile of sacks, and picked up another of them. "Now

then," said he, examining the label, "who's next? Aha—Miss Jane Mackenzie!"

The children could hardly believe their ears. "Oh, Ruddy," whispered Ann in Rudolf's ear, "what kind of dreams do you suppose Aunt Jane will get?"

"Sh! Listen, he's going to tell us," answered Rudolf.

The Sandman was gravely consulting his list. "M-hm—Cook-that-likes-living-in-the-Country! Step this way, ma'am, and don't take any more room than you can help. New Non-fadable Cheap but Elegant Parlor Curtains—One Able-bodied Intelligent Gardener, with a Generous Disposition—hurry the gentleman forward, boys, he's a curiosity! What's next? Aha! One niece, two nephews —three perfectly good children." Sandy paused, stared about him at the throng of

jumping, pushing dreams—then added: "Don't see 'em."

"Why, yes you do!" Ann was pulling impatiently at the Sandman's sleeve—"Here you are." Then she truned to Rudolf and whispered excitedly: "Don't you see? We must make the Sandman believe we are Aunt Jane's Good Dreams, and then he'll send us back to her."

"I'd like a ride on that slide, all right!" returned Rudolf.

"But I doesn't want to go back to Aunt Jane yet," came the voice of Peter clearly from behind them. "I shan't go till I've seen the Bad Dreams."

"Nonsense!" Rudolf turned round on him angrily. "Of course you'll go. You're the youngest, and you've *got* to mind us." And then without paying any more attention to

Peter, Rudolf thrust himself in front of the Sandman. "Here we are," he said. "We're all ready."

The Sandman looked the boy up and down, consulted his list again, smiled and shook his head very doubtfully.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I'm afraid you don't exactly answer. Just listen to this." And he read aloud: "Number one. Boy: polite and gentlemanly in manner—brown hair neatly smoothed and parted—Eton suit, clean white collar, boots well polished—Latin grammar under arm—"

He stopped. Rudolf, in his pajamas, with his ruffled locks, tin sword, and angry expression, did not answer very closely to this description. The Cook-who-liked-living-in-the-Country, the Gardener-with-the-Generous-Disposition, and several other Good

Dreams burst out laughing. Only the False Hare kept a solemn expression, but Rudolf knew very well what *that* meant.

The Sandman continued: "Number two. Little girl: modest and timid in her manners, not apt to address her elders until spoken to—hair braided neatly and tied with blue ribbon—white apron over dark dress—doing patchwork with a pleased expression. Has not forgotten thimble—"

Here Sandy was interrupted by the Cook and the Gardener, who declared that if he didn't stop they'd die a-laughin', that they would! The False Hare wiped away a tear, and none of the dreams seemed to consider the description correct. Sandy shook his head again, as he glanced at Ann in her nighty, her ruffled curls tumbling over her flushed face—Ann without patchwork, thimble, or pleased expression!

"Afraid you won't do, miss," said he, looking quite sorry for her. "Let's see what's next. Number three"—he read—"Very small boy: clean blue sailor suit—white socks—looks sorry for—"

All turned to look at Peter, but Peter was not looking sorry for anything—Peter was not there! Ann gave a hasty look all round the glade, then burst into tears.

"Oh, Rudolf," she cried, "what shall we do? He's gone—he's slipped away to find those Bad Dreams all by himself—you know how Peter is, when he says he's going to do anything, he *will* do it. Oh, oh, I *ought* to have watched him!"

"Don't cry," said Rudolf hastily. "It's just as much my fault. You stay here and I'll go fetch him back. I have my sword, you know."

"No, no," sobbed Ann. "Don't leave me.

It was my fault—I promised mother I would always look after Peter. We'll go together. The Sandman will tell us where the Bad Dreams live, won't you?" she added, turning to Sandy.

"There, there, of course I will," said the little man kindly. "I'd go along with you, if there wasn't such a press of business just now, but you can see for yourselves what a mess things would be in if I should leave. You must go right ahead, right into the thick of the woods. Follow that path on the other side of the glade. You needn't be afraid you'll miss those Bad Ones—they'll be on the lookout for you, I'm afraid."

The children thanked Sandy for all his kindness, and turned to leave him. "One moment," he cried, and he ran ahead of them to draw aside the wall of prickly bushes and show them the little path he had spoken of

which wound from the Good Dreams' glade toward the heart of the wood.

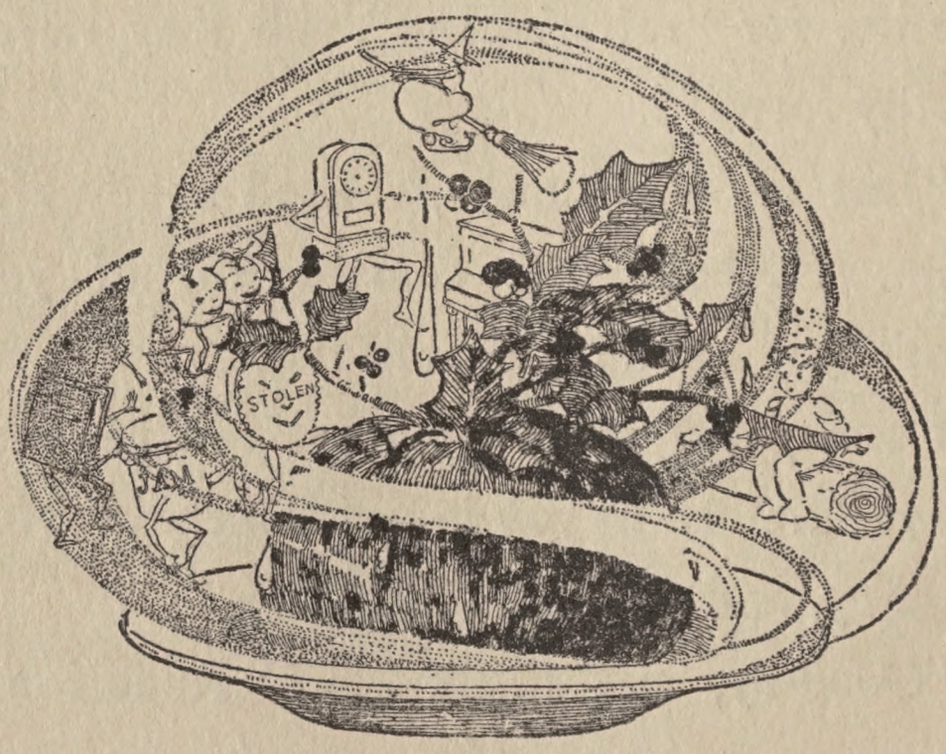
"Keep right on," said Sandy, "and don't be afraid. Remember—they're a queer lot, those fellows, but they can't hurt you if you are careful. Don't answer 'em back and don't ask 'em too many questions. One thing in particular—if they offer you anything to eat, don't taste a mouthful of it. If you do it'll be the worse for you!"

Rudolf and Ann thought of Peter and his passion for "refreshments", and they started hastily forward.

"Just *one* thing more," called Sandy after them. "About that consignment of your aunt's, you know! I'll hold that over till you get back, and we'll see what can be done. Maybe we can fit you in yet, somehow. Now good-by, and good luck to you!"

"Good-by, and thank you!" Rudolf and

Ann called back to him, and then they plunged into the path. The wall of bushes sprang back again behind them, and cut them off from the shelter of the Good Dreams' glade. As the path was very narrow, Rudolf walked first, sword drawn, and Ann trotted behind him, trying not to think of what queer things might be waiting behind the trees to jump out at them, trying only to think of her naughty Peter, and how glad she would be to see him again.



CHAPTER XII

ENTER THE KNIGHT-MARE

AT first it was easy enough for the children to follow the narrow winding path which the Sandman had pointed out, but soon they came to a part of the wood where the underbrush grew thicker and their path lost itself in a network of other little paths spread out as if on purpose to confuse them. Rudolf and Ann hurried along as fast as they could go, but it was hard work to make their way through the tangled undergrowth where the twisted roots set traps for their feet—and caught them, too, sometimes—while overhead the tall trees met and mingled their branches. From these hung down great masses of trailing vines and spreading creepers like long, lean, hairy arms

stretched out to bar their way. Rudolf had to stop now and then to hack at these arms with his sword before he and Ann could pass through. Worst of all—the thick growth of trees made the wood so dark that they could not see more than a few feet ahead of them.

"Oh, Ruddy, I'm sure we're not on the right path any more," said Ann at last. "Peter is so little—he never, never could have pushed his way through here!"

"N-no," admitted Rudolf. "Perhaps he couldn't, but maybe he stuck to the right path, Ann, and if he did he's there by this time."

"But I don't want him to get there!" poor Ann cried. "That would be much worse for him than being lost. If he's just around the wood somewhere we can find him and bring him back and then coax Sandy to send us all home by the toboggan-slide to Aunt Jane, but if he's found the Bad Dreams or they've found

him—Oh, Ruddy, how do we know what awful things they may be doing to him!"

"Don't be a goose, Ann," said Rudolf stoutly, though he was really beginning to feel worried himself. "You know they are only dreams if they *are* bad. What can a dream do, anyway? They're not real."

"Oh, they're real enough," sighed little Ann. "Sometimes the things in dreams are real-er than real things. I'm 'fraid enough of real cows, but *they* can't walk up-stairs like the dream cows can—and, oh, I remember the dream I dreamed about the Dentist-man, after I had my tooth pulled, the one father gave me the dollar for—and—"

"Bother!" said Rudolf. "I've had lots worse dreams than cows and dentists. P'lice-men and Indian chiefs, and—oh, heaps of things, and I didn't really mind 'em, either, but then I'm braver than—"

"Sh!" interrupted Ann, stopping and catching at Rudolf's arm. "I hear something—something queer. Listen!"

Rudolf listened. "I don't hear anything," he said at last. "What was it like?"

"Oh, such a creepy, crawly sound, and—Oh, Ruddy—there is a face—see it? A horrid little face peeping out at us from behind that tree!"

Rudolf saw the face too, a winking, blinking, leering, little face much like the one that had grinned at Ann from the post of the big bed not so very long ago.

All at once as the children looked about them, they began to see faces everywhere, faces in the crotches of the trees, faces where the branches crossed high above their heads, faces even in the undergrowth about their feet. It reminded Rudolf of the puzzle pictures he and Ann were

"I hear something—something queer."

so fond of studying where you have to look and look before you can find the hidden people, but when once you have found them you wonder how you could have been so stupid as not to have spied them long before. He heard distinctly now the noises Ann had heard. It was as if the hidden places of the wood were full of small live things which were gathering together and coming toward the children from every direction, closing them in on every side. Then somebody laughed in a high cracked voice just behind them, one of Ann's curls was sharply pulled, and Rudolf's precious sword was plucked from his hand and tossed upon the ground. Still they could see no bodies to which the little faces could belong, and they began to feel very queer indeed.

Then came the laugh again, repeated a number of times and coming now from di-

rectly over their heads where the branches of a great beech tree swept almost to the ground. Rudolf and Ann looked up just in time to catch sight of the queer little creatures who were looking down at them from between the beech leaves. It was no wonder they had been so hard to see, for they were dressed in tight-fitting suits of fur exactly the color of the bark, and had small pointed fur hoods upon their heads which made them look very much like squirrels. Even now that the children had spied them out, it was impossible to examine them closely for they were never quiet, never in the same place more than an instant, but swung themselves restlessly from bough to bough, then to the ground and back again in two jumps, peeping, peering, racing each other along the branches, all the time without the slightest noise other than was made by their light feet

among the leaves and the two laughs the children had heard.

Rudolf picked up his sword, and said in as bold a voice as he could manage—"Please, could any of you tell us the right path to—"

A burst of sharp squeals, shrill laughs, and jeering remarks interrupted his question. The whole company of queer creatures dropped to the ground at the same time, and instantly formed a circle about the children, snapping their little white teeth, and grinning and chattering like monkeys.

"Are you the Bad Dreams?" asked Rudolf. Then, as a burst of laughter contradicted this idea—"Who are you, then?"

"Who are we? Who are we?" mocked the creatures. "O-ho, hear the human! Doesn't know us—never got scolded on *our* account, did he, did he? *Oh,* no; *oh,* no! Bite him, snatch him, scratch him! *Catch* him!"

Closer and closer the horrid little things pressed about the two children. "What do you mean, anyway?" cried Rudolf, keeping them back with his foot as best he could. "Who are you? You're squirrels—that's all you are!"

"Squirrels!" The leader of the little wretches seemed furious at the idea. "No, no," he screamed, making a dash at Rudolf's leg with his sharp teeth. "We're Fidgets, Fidgets, Fidgets! Don't you know the Fidgets when you see 'em, you great blundering human, you? An old, *old* family, that's what we are. Guess Methuselah had the Fidgets sometimes, guess he did, did, did!" With every one of the last three words he made a snatch at Rudolf, trying his best to bite him, and at the same time dodging cleverly the blows Rudolf was now dealing on all sides with his sword.

Ann had picked up a little stick and was doing her best to help Rudolf in his battle. "I know you," she cried, turning angrily on the Fidgets, "you horrid little things! I've had you often, in school just before it's out, and in church, and when mother takes me out to make calls—you've disgraced her often—" Then she stopped, really afraid of saying too much. The Fidgets, with a wild squeal, now began a mad sort of dance round and round the two children, giving them now a nip, now a pinch, now a sharp pull till they were dizzy and frightened and weary of trying to defend themselves against such unequal numbers.

All at once, above the shrill cries of their enemies, the children heard a new sound, a crackling rustling noise in the bushes as if some large creature was making its way through the wood. The Fidgets heard it, too, and in a twinkling they had hushed their

shrill voices, broken their circle, and completely hidden themselves from sight. It was all so sudden that Rudolf and Ann had no time to run, but stood perfectly still, gazing at the bushes just in front of them from which the noises came.

As they looked the bushes were parted, and a long lean head poked itself through, a large black head with a white streak down its nose, and two great mournful eyes that stared into theirs. Ann gave a little scream and shrank closer to Rudolf. The creature opened a wide mouth that showed enormous, ugly, yellow teeth, and said in a rough but not unfriendly voice: "Hullo! Oats-and-Broadswords—if it's not a couple of lost colts! Where'd you come from, youngsters?"

Without waiting for them to answer, it crashed through the bushes and stood before

them, a curious sight, indeed the strangest they had yet seen in the course of their adventures. What they had thought was a horse from the sight of its head, was a horse no farther down than the shoulders, all the rest of him was a Knight, a splendid knight in full armor of shining steel. He was without weapon of any kind, and even while the children shrank from the sight of his big ugly head with its sad eyes and long yellow teeth, they saw that this was not a creature to be much afraid of.

"Well, I scared 'em away, didn't I?" he asked triumphantly, and then, hanging his head a little, he added in rather a humble tone, "It's pretty poor sport hunting Fidgets, I know, but it's about all I can get nowadays. Hope they didn't hurt you?" he added politely.

"Not a bit," said Rudolf, "but I'm sure

I'm glad you came along when you did, for I don't know how we ever would have got rid of the beastly little things. Only when we first saw you, we thought—"

"Oh, I know," interrupted the stranger hastily—"you thought it was something worse. That's it, that's just my luck! I'm the gentlest creature in the world and everybody's afraid of me. My business," he explained, turning to Ann, "is to redress wrongs and to see after the ladies, but—bless you—they won't let me get near enough to do anything for 'em!" A great tear rolled down his long nose as he spoke, and he looked so silly that Ann and Rudolf could hardly help laughing at him, though they did not in the least want to be rude.

"And then," continued the creature, sobbing, "I'm so divided in my feelings. If I were only *all* Knight, now, or even all Mare,

I'd be thankful, but a Knight-mare is an unsatisfactory sort of thing to be."

"A Knight-mare—Oh, how dreadful!" cried Ann, drawing away from him. "Is *that* what you are?"

"There! You see how it is!" exclaimed the Knight-mare, tossing his long black mane. "Nobody's got any sympathy for me. How would *you* like it? Suppose you were a little girl only as far as your shoulders and all the rest of you hippopotamus, eh?"

"I wouldn't like it at all," said Ann, after thinking a moment.

"Then no more do I," said the Knight-mare, and sighed a long sad sigh.

"Would you mind telling us how it happened?" asked Rudolf politely.

"Not at all," said the Knight-mare. "You see I was a great boy for fighting in the old days—though you mightn't think it to see me

now—and I used to ride forth to battle on my coal-black steed, this very mare whose head I'm wearing now. Well, of course I was a terror to my enemies, used to scare 'em into fits, and I suppose it was one of those very fellows that got me into this fix, dreamed me into it one night, you know, only he got me and my steed mixed. We've stayed mixed ever since, and the worst of it is I oughtn't to be a Bad Dream at all. I was the nicest kind of a Good Dream once—why I belonged to a lady who lived in a castle, and she thought a lot of me, she did!"

"It's too bad," said Rudolf sympathetically; "but isn't there anything you can do about it?"

"Nothing," groaned the Knight-mare, "nothing at all. At least not till I can find a way to get rid of this ugly head of mine. If there was anybody big enogh and brave

enough, now, to—" He interrupted his speech to stoop down and snatch up something from the grass. It was Rudolf's sword which he had dropped from his hand in his weariness after his battle with the Fidgets. "What's this?" the Knight-mare cried. "Hurrah, a sword!"

"My sword," said Rudolf, stretching out his hand for it.

"Just the thing for cutting heads off!" cried the Knight. "Will you lend it to me, like a good fellow? Mine is lost."

"What for?" asked Rudolf suspiciously.

"Why, to cut my head off with, of course, or better yet, perhaps you'll do it for me. Come, now! Just to oblige me?"

Rudolf took back his sword, while Ann gave a little scream and seized both the Knight's mailed hands in hers. "I'm sorry not to oblige you," said Rudolf firmly, "but I can't do anything of the sort. I never cut

anybody's head off in my life, and the sword's not so awful sharp, you know, and then how can you tell a new head will grow at your time of life?"

"Oh, I'd risk that," said the Knight-mare lightly. "I do wish you'd think it over. If you knew what a life mine is! All my days spent browsing round on shoots here in the wood, without a single adventure because nobody's willing to be rescued by the likes of me! And then the nights! Oh"—groaned the poor fellow—"the nights are the worst of all!"

"What do you do then?" asked Rudolf and Ann.

"Oh, I'm ridden to death," sighed the Knight-mare. "As if it wasn't bad enough to scare folks all day *not* meaning to, without being sent out nights to do it on purpose!" He looked over his shoulder as if he was afraid some one might be listening, and then added

in a low voice, "And it's not my fault, either, I swear it's not. *They* actually make me do it!"

The children shivered, for they guessed at once that "they" meant the Bad Dreams. Then they suddenly recollected poor little Peter, whom their last adventure and the Knight-mare's talk had quite put out of their minds.

"I tell you what," said Rudolf suddenly, "I'll make a bargain with you. My little brother has run away to find the Bad Dreams, and we have got to find him and bring him back. If you'll lead us to him and help us all you can, why—why—I won't promise—but I'll see what I can do for you."

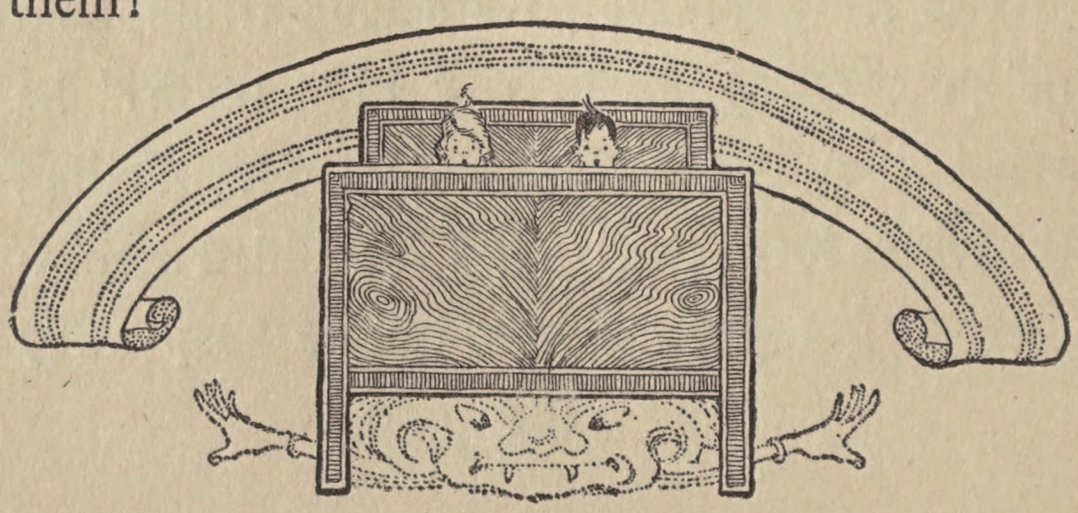
The Knight-mare gave a loud triumphant neigh. "Ods-bodikins and bran mash!" he cried. "You're worth rescuing for nothing, the whole lot of you! But"—he added mournfully—"I ought to warn you to keep away

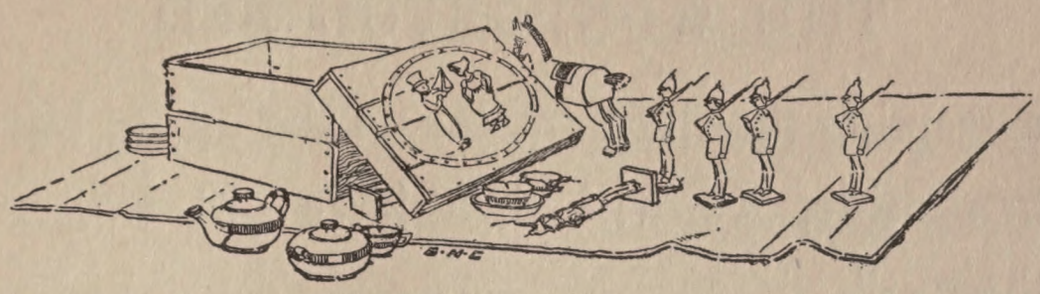
from that crowd—they're a bad lot. You'd do better to cut along home."

"We can't do that," cried Rudolf and Ann together.

"Then come with me," said the Knightmare. "It's only a short way to—"

He was suddenly interrupted by a fresh commotion in the wood. Heavy bodies were parting the undergrowth back of where they stood. Before the children could think of escape, four strange figures sprang on them from behind, their arms were seized, they were tripped up, and they landed very hard upon the ground. Both knew in a moment what had happened. The Bad Dreams had caught them!





CHAPTER XIII

THE BAD DREAMS

AT first the children's view was entirely shut off by the size and heaviness of the things that were sitting on their chests. They had been completely taken by surprise and they had not even breath enough left to cry out, but lay still and listened to what was going on about them. This is what they heard:

"Ye arre arristid in the name of the Law!" a gruff voice was saying. "Move on, move on, move on."

"One moment, Officer," a second voice interrupted. "Imprison these young persons, if you are so disposed, but pray allow me first my little opportunity to practise on them. This young lady—ahem! We will begin by

extracting that large molar on the upper left-hand side, we will then have out two or three—"

"Ugh—ugh!" A series of hoarse grunts, and what had been sitting on Rudolf rose up and rushed at the last speaker. "No, no! Big Chief first! Big Chief Thunder-snorer take two fine scalp—ha! ha!"

There was a confused sound of struggling and voices arguing, and in another moment Ann was relieved of her burden which, with a mighty moo, got up and joined the others. Ann sat up and clung to Rudolf, while the Knight-mare who was standing close beside her, laid a protecting hand upon her shoulder. When she saw what had been holding her down, she gave a little shriek. It was a small spotted cow in a red flannel petticoat. She wore stout button boots on her hind feet, and she now reared herself upon these to flourish

two angry hoofs over the sleek head of a little man in a white linen coat who held a tiny mirror in one hand and a pair of pincers in the other. Ann took a great dislike to this little man at once, and felt more afraid of him than of the Cow or of the handsome Indian Chief in full war-paint—feather head-dress and all—who was brandishing his tomahawk, sometimes in the face of the Little Dentist, again under the turned-up nose of a large fat Policeman who stood with folded arms, the only calm member of that much-excited group.

The Knight-mare stepped forward and put himself between the children and the Bad Dreams. "Look here, you fellows," he said quietly, "you may as well stop this nonsense first as last. You haven't got any business here, and well you know it. If the Boss finds you've been disposing of any prisoners with-

out his permission—well—*you* know what'll happen!"

That the Bad Dreams did know was to be seen by their foolish scared expressions. The Indian Chief, with a disappointed grunt, replaced his tomahawk in his belt, and seated himself cross-legged on the grass, drawing his blanket closely about him. The Policeman stopped murmuring "Move on!" The Cow dropped clumsily on all fours and began to crop the bushes. Even the Little Dentist put his pincers back into his pocket, though he still looked wistfully at Ann, who avoided his eye as much as she could. This was a very terrifying company in which the children found themselves, and in spite of the comforting presence of the friendly Knight-mare, they felt very doubtful of their present safety, not to speak of what might be done to them when once they were in the clutches of that

dreadful "Boss", whom even the Bad Dreams seemed to be afraid of.

"He has all the fun, anyway," snorted the Cow, switching her tail. "All the choice bits of torturing. Why, I've not had so much as a single toss since I've been on this job; no I haven't!" And she shook her sharp curved horns at Ann.

"Not a tooth out yet!" complained the Dentist, "not a single one." He sighed, glancing from Ann to Rudolf and from Rudolf back again to Ann, as if he expected they might be coaxed into presenting him with a full set each.

"'Tis himsilf does all the arristin'," muttered the Policeman sadly.

"Big-boss-chief take all good scalp," Thunder-snorer, the Indian, grunted.

The children began to think this "Boss" must indeed be a terror.

"Now, come, come," continued the Knightmare soothingly, "it's not so bad as that. You all get plenty of fun, but you mustn't mix it up with business. We're in a row now, every one of us, for being out of bounds. Better move along and have it over, that's my advice."

The Policeman looked more cheerful. "That's it," cried he. "Move on!"

Ann put her little arms around the Knightmare's neck and whispered something in his ear. He turned to the Cow and said:

"Madam, this young lady wishes to know if anything has been seen or heard of another prisoner, a small fat one called Peter?"

"Sir," said the Cow, "he was taken just a little while ago. That's why we four went off in a huff. We wanted a little fun with him, just a bit of our pretty play, you know, but the Boss wouldn't have it. He's saving him up

for the Banquet, and not one of us is to be let at him till after that."

Rudolf and Ann looked at each other, both suddenly remembering the Sandman's warning that on no account were any of them to taste the Bad Dreams' food. Could Peter be expected to refuse any kind of refreshments at any time? They knew that he could not.

"Come," cried Rudolf, pulling at the Knight-mare's arm. "Take us to him, please. We've got to hurry."

The Knight-mare obligingly stepped forward, leading Ann by the hand, and the Bad Dreams—to the children's surprise—rose meekly to accompany them. It was decided that the Cow should go first, to clear a way through the forest by her simple method of trampling down everything before her. The Indian walked next, stepping softly and silently on his moccasined feet, and turning

now and then to make a horrid face at the children who followed behind him, one on either side of the Knight-mare. The Dentist and Policeman, walking arm in arm, brought up the rear. The party had not gone a great distance through the wood, before Ann and Rudolf noticed that the underbrush was growing thinner and the trees beginning to be taller and farther apart. At last they could see through a veil of branches the light of a fire burning on the ground not a great distance ahead of them, and soon they came close to the enormous oak tree under which this fire was kindled. Its flames were a strange bluish color, and as they shot up into the darkness which was almost complete under the shade of that great tree, the children could plainly see strange figures showing black against the light, leaping and dancing around the fire.

"The party's begun, but not the Banquet," whispered the Knight-mare. "You can come a little closer, but you mustn't interrupt till it's over."

In silence they all moved a little nearer to the cleared space under the tree, but not so near as to be discovered. Rudolf and Ann gazed anxiously at the scene before them. First of all they noticed that the fire was not an ordinary fire, but a huge blazing plum pudding which accounted for the queer color of its flames. It was stuck full of bits of crackling holly and dripped sweet-smelling sauce in every direction. On the other side of the fire, just opposite to them, was a moss-grown log, and on this log sat Peter. His big brown eyes, shining with excitement, were fixed on the dancers passing before him, his little nose sniffed the burning plum pudding with great

satisfaction. As soon as her eye fell on her little brother, Ann started toward him, but the Knight-mare held her back.

"No use," said he. "Wait a bit, and I'll tell you when the real trouble's going to begin."

The children had no choice but to obey, and their attention was soon occupied by the strange sights before them. As one odd figure after another sprang out of the dark into the firelight, capered and pranced, and then disappeared into the blackness again, Ann and Rudolf drew closer together and squeezed hands, very queer feelings creeping up and down their back-bones. The strangest part of it all was that among that crazy company were many whom the children did not see for the first time, who were old acquaintances of theirs! There—grinning and brandishing his stick—was the Little Black Man who had

worried Rudolf many a night as far back as he could remember. There was the Old Witch on the Broomstick, whom Ann had often described to him. There again, were other Bad Dreams that made the children almost smile as they remembered certain exciting times. The Angry Farmer—Rudolf had seen him before; he remembered his fierce expression, yes, and his short black whip, too! Also the Cross Cook, her fat arms rolled up in her apron, and "I'm going to tell your mother," written plainly on her round red face. A great white Jam Pot danced just behind the Cook, and was followed by a dozen bright Green Apples. A Dancing-master came next, bowing and smiling at Peter as he passed him, then a Bear paddling clumsily along on its hind legs, its great red mouth wide open to show its long white teeth, then a Gooseberry Tart marked "Stolen", then an Arithmetic

with a mean sort of face, rulers for legs, and compasses for arms; then a Clock that had been meddled with by somebody (Rudolf felt certain it was not by him) and kept striking all the time; then a Piano with a lot of horrid exercises waiting to be practised; then last of all a familiar clumsy figure with one red glaring eye—their old enemy, the Warming-pan!

As Rudolf was trying to take in these, and many others in that curious throng, he felt himself sharply pinched by Ann. "Look, look," she whispered, "over there where it's so dark, close to Peter. Oh, don't you know *now* who their Boss is?"

Rudolf looked. Clearly enough now he saw two flaming green eyes and a clumsy black figure crouching on the ground. Before this figure every one of the dancers made a low bow as he passed.

"Don't you know him?" repeated Ann, shivering with excitement. "It's Manunderthebed!"

"Oh, well, what if it is?" whispered Rudolf. "I stopped bothering about *him* years ago. He's only for babies."

Ann was not deceived by Rudolf's cheerful tone. Manunderthebed might not amount to much at home with nurse and mother to frighten him away, but here in his own country it was not pleasant to meet him.

"He's horrid," said she. "Oh, look, Ruddy, what is he doing now?"

Manunderthebed had stretched out a long black arm and pointed to the fire. Instantly the Bad Dreams stopped their dance and vanished into the darkness. When they came again into the firelight the children saw that the Cook, the Dancing-master, and several others carried large dishes in their hands

which they now presented with low bows to Peter.

"It's the Banquet!" whispered the Knight-mare nervously. "If he touches a morsel, he's lost. He'll go to sleep and dream Bad Dreams forever and a day—which won't be pleasant, I assure you."

Ann and Rudolf had not waited for the Knight-mare to finish his speech. They rushed on Peter, just as he had helped himself to an enormous slice of mince pie, and while Ann threw her arms about his neck, Rudolf snatched the tempting morsel out of his hand and cast it in the fire. Of course Peter struggled and fussed and was not a bit grateful, but Rudolf and Ann did not care, for the Knight-mare's warning rang in their ears. Meanwhile the Bad Dreams had gathered round the three children in an angry circle, and Manunderthebed growled out:

"Seize 'em, some of you! Where's that fat Policeman?"

"Here, sorr." Very much against his will the Policeman had been pushed forward till he stood in front of the children, hanging his head and looking very uncomfortable.

"Arrest 'em, why don't you?" shouted the Boss.

"Please, sorr, Oi have," muttered the Policeman humbly, shifting from one foot to the other and looking more and more unhappy.

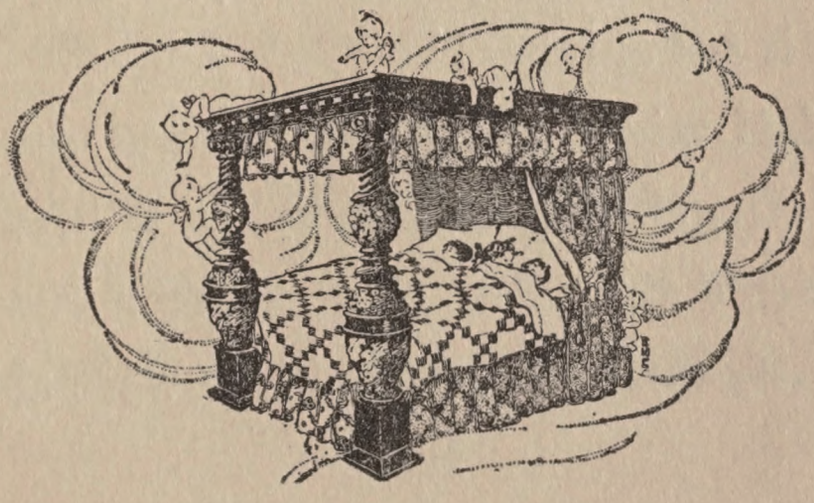
"Then do it all over again, and be quick about it—or—" Manunderthebed made a terrible face at the Policeman, who shivered, and edging up to Rudolf, laid a timid hand on his shoulder.

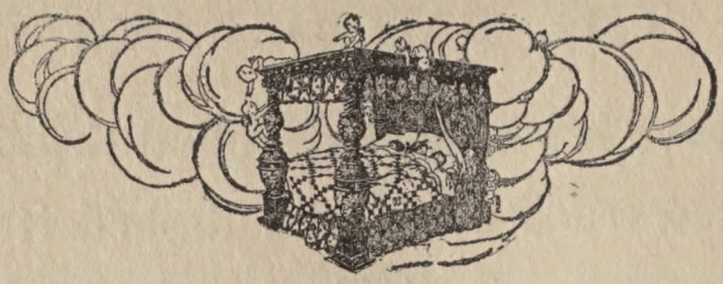
"No you don't!" cried Rudolf. "I'm not afraid of *you!*" And he gave the Policeman a poke with his sword, just a little one, about

where his belt came. The Policeman gave a frightened yell, doubled up as if he had been shot, and ducking under the shoulders of the crowd made off into the darkness. Manunderthebed was furious. The children heard him roar out a command, and then the Bad Dreams advanced on them in a body. The leaping dancing flames of the plum-pudding fire showed their angry faces and strange figures.

Rudolf was not really afraid now, for he saw at once that the Bad Dreams were not much at fighting, yet there were so many of them that by sheer force of their numbers they were slowly but surely pushing the three children back, back, until they were crowded against the trunk of the great oak tree where Manunderthebed had been crouching. He had run to fetch a great branch of burning holly from the fire, and holding this like a

torch above his head, he pressed through the crowd toward Rudolf and dashed it almost into his eyes. Rudolf shrank back, half blinded by the glare, and bumped sharply into Peter, who in turn was pushed violently against Ann, who had set her back firmly against the tree trunk. The tree, as she described it afterward, seemed to give way behind her, and she fell backward into soft smothery darkness. Peter fell after her and Rudolf on top of Peter. The little door which had opened to receive them snapped to again, as if by magic, and from the other side of it the triumphant howls of the Bad Dreams came very faintly to their ears.





CHAPTER XIV

IN THE HOLLOW TREE

AT first it seemed perfectly dark inside the tree, but after the children had rubbed out of their eyes the soft powdery dust which their fall had stirred up, they made out the dull glow of a dying fire, a real one in a real fireplace this time, and no plum-pudding affair. From the amount of furniture they knocked against in moving about they knew they must be in somebody's house.

"Oh, dear," whispered Ann, "I hope the owner is not at home!"

Rudolf said nothing, for he was groping about after the poker. He found it presently and stirred the embers into quite a cheerful blaze. By this light the children were able to

see dimly what the room was like. It was circular in shape and the walls and ceiling were covered with rough bark. The floor was of earth, covered with a thick carpet of dry leaves. There were several chairs and a round table all made of boughs with the bark left on and the mantel-piece was built of curiously twisted branches. On it stood a round wooden clock and a pair of wooden candlesticks. A pair of spectacles lay on the top of a pile of large fat books upon the table.

"I'd like to know whose house this is," said Rudolf.

"It's Manunderthebed's house," said Peter calmly.

"How do you know?" cried Ann and Rudolf.

" 'Cause I *do* know," said Peter.

"Oh, Peter, you naughty boy, you are so provoking!" exclaimed Ann, hugging him.

"Tell sister what you mean, and what you've been doing and why you ran away to find those horrid creatures!"

"Aren't horrid," said Peter, wriggling away from her, "and *'tis* Manunderthebed's house, 'cause he came out by the little door when the Bad Dreams brought me. He came out of his little door, and he said 'Peter, will you come to my party?' "

"But there isn't any little door now," interrupted Rudolf, "anyway, *I* can't find it." He had taken a candle from the mantel-piece, had lighted it at the fire, and was making a careful search of the walls. No trace of a door or any opening except the fireplace could be seen.

"It's a magic door," said Peter cheerfully. "Manunderthebed touched something with his foot and that opened it and then he pushed you and you pushed me and I bumped into Ann, and here we are."

"He's shut us up on purpose!" cried Ann. "It's just like him."

"He's shut us up to starve us into submission, like they do in books," said Rudolf gloomily.

"I'm starved now," began Peter, "and that was the very *nicest* pie!" But the other two were much provoked with Peter for having led them into such a fix, and they would not listen to him any longer. By Rudolf's orders, Ann lighted the other candle and both searched again with the greatest care for some trace of the secret door. At last Ann's sharp eyes spied not a door, but a small opening in the wall far above their heads, like a little round window not much bigger than a knot-hole. Rudolf climbed upon the table, but found he was hardly tall enough to look through, so he was obliged to hoist Peter upon his shoulders and let him have first look.

When the little boy got his eye to the window he gave such a shout of surprise that he nearly knocked Rudolf and himself completely off the table.

"Hush," warned his brother, "you mustn't make a noise! Can you see what the Bad Dreams are doing?"

"Yes, I can see 'em," whispered Peter. "They're all sitting round the fire and Man-underthebed is making a speech."

"What's he saying?" asked Ann anxiously.

"I can't hear, but he's awful cross. Now the Little Black Man has gone—now he's come back again, and—oh!"

"What is it? What is it?" cried Ann and Rudolf.

"He's got three animals on a chain—a bear, an'—an'—a lion—an' a great big white wolf!"

"Oh, Peter, darling, you *know* they're only dream animals!" Ann hastily reminded him.

"Well, they're most as nice as real ones, they're awful fierce—"

"What's the Little Black Man doing with 'em?" interrupted Rudolf.

"He's letting them loose," said Peter, "and they're smelling round—"

"He's putting them by the tree to guard us —that's what he's doing," broke in Rudolf.

"To swallow us up if we ever do escape!" wailed Ann, now thoroughly frightened. "Oh, Rudolf, whatever shall we do?"

Rudolf hastily lowered Peter to the floor and got down off the table. "Ann," said he, "there must be another way out. In books there always are two ways out of secret rooms, and this," he added cheerfully, "is the book-iest thing that's happened to us yet. Come, let's look again for it."

He and Ann began the search once more, going over and over the walls by the light of

their candles, but without any success. Peter was nosing about by himself in a little recess by the fireplace, and soon the other two heard him give a gleeful chuckle.

"What is it? Have you found the spring of the secret door?" cried Rudolf, running to him.

"Nope," said Peter. "It's nicer than that, it's a cake. I found it right here on this little shelf that you went past and never noticed."

"Oh, Peter," Ann scolded, "I think you are the very greediest little boy I ever knew!"

"That cake belongs to Manunderthebed, and you know it," said Rudolf sternly. "It's a dream cake, of course, a Bad-dream cake, so you can't eat it."

Peter clasped the small round cake tightly to his breast.

"It's a nice seed-cake like Cook makes," he said stubbornly, "and I *must* eat it."

"The seeds in it are poppy-seeds," explained Rudolf, "and you'll go to sleep and dream Bad Dreams forever, like the Knightmare said, so you *sha'n't* eat it!" He tried to get the cake away from his naughty little brother who only grasped it the more tightly. There would have been a quarrel, and a fierce one, if it had not been for Ann.

"I tell you," said she, "let's try it on the animals!"

This seemed a really bright idea, and Rudolf agreed at once, though Peter considered it wasteful. Ann had to coax some time, but at last she persuaded him to part with his cake. Rudolf would not trust Peter with the distributing, so he piled three fat dictionaries that lay on the table one on top of another and climbed upon them himself, managing in this way to bring his eye to the level of the little window. The plum-pudding fire was burn-

ing very low by this time, and Rudolf could barely make out the forms of some of the Bad Dreams who were stretched on the ground around it.

Suddenly he gave a great start and nearly tumbled off the dictionaries, for he found himself staring down into the yellow hungry eyes of the big white wolf. Peter had described him truly, he was very fierce, wolfier-looking, Rudolf thought, than any of his kind the boy had seen in the dens at the park. Now the beast gave a low growl and opened his great red mouth. Rudolf dropped a generous bit of cake straight into it. The big jaws closed with a snap, and the white wolf looked up for more. By this time the other beasts had discovered the presence of refreshments, and came slinking forward, squatting themselves one on either side of their companion.

Rudolf could hardly help a squeal of surprise at the sight of the yellow lion and the big shambling bear. He remembered in time, though, to smother it, and hastily divided the rest of the cake between the two animals. When they had licked it up greedily, Rudolf turned his attention again to the white wolf, and this time he could not suppress an exclamation of delight.

"Oh, what *is* it, tell us," cried Ann, while Peter jumped up and down impatiently, begging to be allowed to see.

"He's going to sleep—the white wolf is," whispered Rudolf. "He's rocking from side to side—he can hardly stand up—his red tongue is hanging out of his mouth—he looks too silly for anything—now he's rolled over on his back—now he's snoring!"

"And the other animals—the lion and the bear?"

"They are lying down, too, they will be asleep in a moment! There, Peter, didn't I tell you it was a dream cake?"

But even then Peter did not appear grateful. He went back to the shelf where he had found the cake and stood looking at it wistfully, as if he hoped he would find another. Rudolf came up behind him and looked over his shoulder.

"It's no use," said Peter mournfully, "there isn't any more."

"There's this!" cried Rudolf triumphantly, and reaching over Peter he pressed a little round knob of wood half hidden under the shelf. Instantly the whole shelf, together with a large piece of the wall, swung aside, and the children were standing on the threshold of just such another little door as that by which they had entered, only on the other side of the tree. For a moment the three children

hesitated, half afraid to believe in their good luck, and then, taking hold of hands they stepped softly out of their prison. Almost at their feet lay the great white wolf, the yellow lion, and the shaggy bear, all snoring in concert. Carefully avoiding them, the children made for the thick woods ahead, not caring where they went so long as they could escape from their enemies. The big tree was now between them and the plum-pudding fire around which the Bad Dreams lay asleep, so it really seemed as if they had a good chance of getting away unseen.

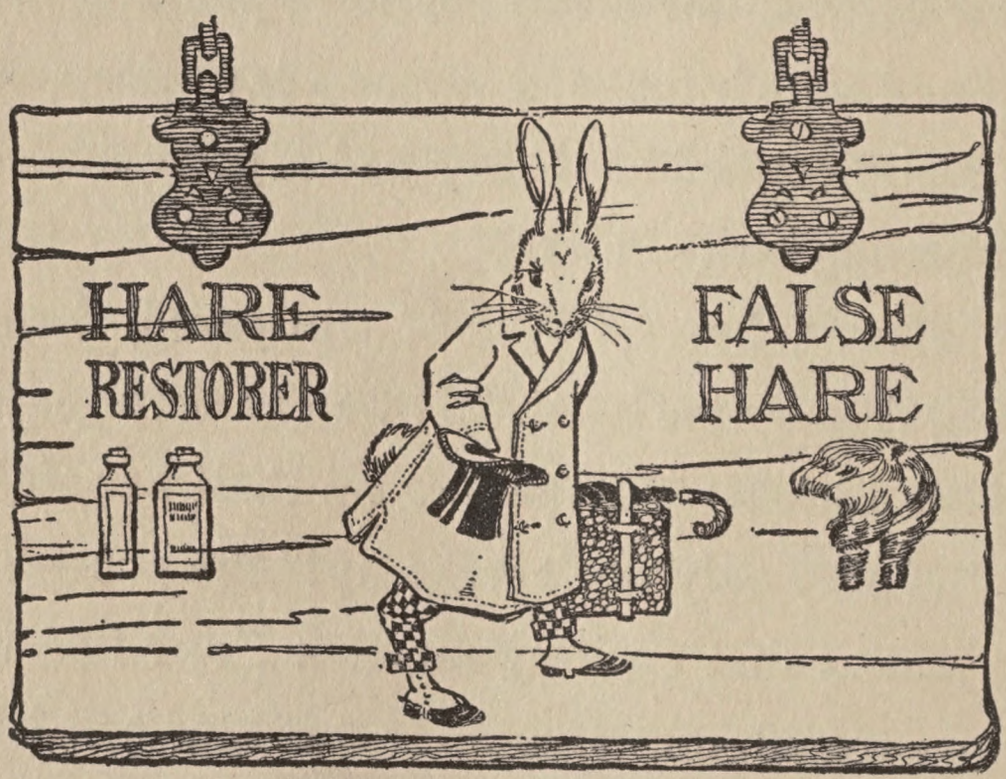
"Hurry, hurry," Rudolf whispered, dragging Ann by the hand. "If we can only get to those thick trees I am sure we shall be safe."

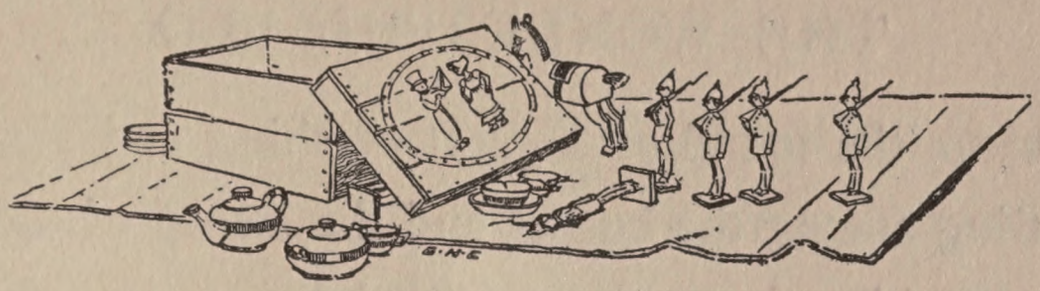
"If they only don't wake up!" she panted.

Just at that exciting moment Peter had to make trouble—as usual. He stumbled and fell over a twisted root, hurt his knee, and gave a

loud angry squeal. Rudolf clapped a hand over his mouth and dragged him to his feet, but it was too late—they were discovered. A tall form shot up out of the grass just behind them, and instantly a loud war-whoop rang through the woods.

"It's Thunder-snorer—it's the Indian," Rudolf cried. "Run for your lives!"





CHAPTER XV

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

THE Bad Dreams were all aroused by Thunder-snorer's war-whoop, and in an instant the whole pack of them, headed by Man-underthebed, were at the children's heels. Rudolf and Ann ran as fast as ever they could, dragging Peter after them, but it was both difficult and dangerous to run fast through that dark wood, especially as they had no idea in what direction they ought to go. Each moment they expected to be overtaken, each moment they seemed to feel Man-underthebed's long black arm stretched out to drag them back to their prison—or to something worse.

Then suddenly from just ahead of them

came the sound of a great crashing and rustling among the bushes and the tramp of approaching feet. Some new danger—perhaps something worse than what was behind them—seemed to threaten the children, but they were too breathless, too bewildered even to try to avoid it. On they ran—straight into the arms of a tall figure who was hurrying to meet them, a knight dressed in shining armor wearing a plumed helmet on his handsome head. At the same moment a troop of little tin soldiers broke through the bushes and rushed past the children to attack the Bad Dreams. All of them were quickly put to flight except their leader, Manunderthebed, who at first sight of the soldiers had hidden himself behind a tree. As soon as they had passed he crept forth and made a dart at the children. But they had a protector now! The tall knight stepped in front of them and raised his

glittering sword. Before he could bring it down, the cowardly King of the Bad Dreams gave a horrible yell and turned to run. He might have escaped, but as he passed Rudolf the boy put out his foot and tripped him up. There the rascal lay on his back, kicking wildly, while the Knight stood guard over him. Seen close by, Manunderthebed was not quite so dreadful as when he crouched in his dark haunt near the hollow tree, but still his shaggy fur, sharp white teeth, and gleaming green eyes were very terrifying to Ann, who gave a little shriek and turned her face away.

"Don't be afraid," cried the Knight. "This is the end of Manunderthebed!" And he stooped and caught hold of the shaggy fellow by the shoulder. A crack, a rip, and the whole silly disguise came away in one piece, fur suit, teeth, claws, and green glass eyes. The terrible King of the Bad Dreams was just a big

naughty boy in knickerbockers who kicked and cried and begged to be let go! The children had to laugh, they could not help it, to hear him blubber and whine and promise over and over again that he'd never, no, *never* frighten little girls and boys any more! So at last the Knight let him scramble to his feet and rush off through the woods as fast as he could go.

"That's the last of *him,*" said the children's protector smiling, "but now tell me, you three, what do you think of the change in *my* appearance?"

For a moment the three children stared up at the tall figure, admiring yet puzzled, then Ann clapped her hands and shouted: "Oh, I know *now* who you are—you're the Knightmare!"

The tall figure swept off his helmet and made Ann such a low bow that his fair curl-

ing locks brushed the ground, fluttering like yellow plumes about his ruddy face. "I'm all knight now," cried he, "and none of me mare. I'm a Good Dream now, and I've no doubt she'll be rather pleased to get me back—the lady I belong to in the castle, you know. I'm wearing her glove, as you may perceive."

"But how did it happen?" asked Ann, fingering the helmet with the greatest admiration.

"Well," said the Knight, "as soon as you children were imprisoned in the hollow tree I managed to escape from those fellows and rushed off to Sandy to get you help. I found he had already sent to the Corn-cob Queen for rescuers and just as we were talking they arrived. I agreed to guide their leader through the woods to Manunderthebed's place if he would first settle a certain little matter for me —that one your brother wasn't very anxious

to tackle, you know. Well, when I asked him if he'd cut off my head, *he* said he'd just as lief as not!"

All three children burst out laughing.

"There's only one person we've met as fierce as that," said Ann, "and that's Captain Jinks."

"Captain Jinks—at your service," snapped a sharp voice at her elbow, and turning, Ann found the little tin captain standing beside her. "I have to report," said he, wheeling around to Rudolf and saluting him stiffly—"the enemy—routed completely!"

Never, never had the children expected to be so glad to meet the little captain again! They thanked him heartily for his part in their splendid rescue, and asked him what he thought it was best to do next.

"Sound a recall," answered the officer, "and return in good order according to commands."

"Whose commands, Captain Jinks?" Ru-

dolf wanted to know, but Jinks would not answer any more questions just then. He recalled those of his fierce little soldiers who, with the sergeant at their head, were still chasing the last remnants of the Bad Dreams back to the depths of the wood, formed them into marching order, and taking the head of the procession himself, placed the children directly behind him under the protection of the Knight. They were anxious to have the little captain explain all the particulars of their rescue, but found it very hard indeed to make him talk while on duty. He marched so fast that they had to trot to keep up with him, and stared straight ahead without winking an eye. "Queen's orders," was all they could at first get out of him.

"But, Jinks, dear, who was it brought the message to the Queen?" Ann coaxed.

"Traveling Gentleman!" The little cap-

tain made a disgusted face. *"He's* a nice one! Said nobody was being shut up nowhere, nor didn't *want* to be rescued."

For a moment the children were puzzled, then Rudolf called out, "Oh, I know—the False Hare!"

They all laughed and Ann said: "I suppose Sandy didn't know any better than to send him, but I should think he'd make a pretty funny messenger!"

"Make a better pie," said Jinks grimly, and not another word could they get out of him after that. They were now coming to that part of the wood Ann and Rudolf remembered so well, where the kindly Knight had rescued them from the attack of the tiresome Fidgets. They looked about for signs of the little creatures' presence in the branches overhead, and listened for their chattering laughter, but the coming of so large a company must have

scared the cowardly Fidgets away, for not a trace of them was to be seen.

At last the procession struck the little path Sandy had pointed out to the children, and in another moment it was being met and greeted by a whole troop of Good Dreams who had rushed to welcome the returning party and escort them back to the glade. Here they found the whole family assembled: the Cook-that-liked-living-in-the-Country, the Gardener-with-the-Generous-Disposition, the Pink Stockings, the Nice Nurse, the Good Baby, the Easter Rabbit, the Birthday Cake, the Organ Man, the Tall Candlesticks, and the Jolly Santa Claus—one and all of the Good Dreams, with Noddy and Blink, the two fat boys, and—best of all—old Sandy himself, a twinkle in his sleepy eyes, a grin on his round good-humored face.

"Well, well, well," cried he. "Glad to see

you back again, my friends! Guess *you've* had enough of the bad 'uns—eh, young man?" And he gave Peter a kindly dig in the ribs. Peter grinned and looked rather foolish but said nothing. "And now," went on Sandy, pushing aside the excited dreams that crowded round him, "make way, all of you! Let these young people see who's come to welcome them." He led the children across the glade to where, throned on a pile of sacks, sat the Corn-cob Queen! There she was in her greeny-yellowy gown, her little head erect, her sweet face smiling, her tiny hands stretched out to greet the children. They could have hugged her, but they didn't dare, she looked, in spite of being just a doll and an old-fashioned one at that, so truly like a Queen. Back of her majesty stood a group of doll ladies-in-waiting dressed in their gayest clothes, and among them were Ann's very

own children, Marie-Louise and Angelina-Elfrida! They did not look haughty or naughty or cross any more, but smiled sweetly at their little mother.

"Yes," said the Queen, "I have come to welcome you back, dears, and to say good-by, for I suppose you would like to go home to your Aunt Jane now, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, please your Majesty," cried Rudolf and Ann in one breath—but Peter said nothing. He was gazing rather regretfully at the False Hare who lounged near by, smoking his chocolate cigarette and polishing the nap of his silk hat with the back of his paw. The False Hare winked at Peter and edged a little closer to him. "Mighty glad to see the last of you, old chap," he whispered. Then Peter smiled all over, he was so pleased.

"Yes, I suppose it's time for you to be go-

ing, if go you really must," sighed Sandy. "And since you're in such a hurry, I'm happy to be able to include you in that consignment of your aunt's after all. She"—and he bowed gallantly to the Queen—"says it's all right, and what she says goes, though to be sure, it's out of order, slightly out of order!" As he spoke he took his list out of his pocket and ran his eye over it once more. "Hullo," said he in a surprised tone, "there's one more item on Miss Jane Mackenzie's and it seems to be missing! Comparatively unimportant, but I like to have my things complete. 'One lost Kitten!' Now what can have become of that, I wonder?"

It was Captain Jinks' voice that broke the silence. "Prisoner of War, sir! Taken with others by the Commander-in-Chief in the recent glorious victory of the tin soldiers over the cat pirates. Here you are, sir!" He mo-

"Now then, all ready?"

tioned to two of the soldiers who stood on guard over something in a dim corner of the glade. The soldiers hustled the object forward. It was Captain Mittens! Mittens despoiled of his scarlet sash, his turban, his sword and pistols, even of his fierce expression! Mittens, no longer a bold and bloody robber of the seas but a humble repentant kitten who let himself be cuddled into Peter's arms without so much as a single scratch.

Peter stroked the pirate—and the pirate purred!

"Now then, all ready? All aboard!" It was Sandy's voice who spoke and Sandy's were the arms that lifted the children gently into the enormous sack held open by Noddy and Blink, and placed them at the top of the toboggan-slide—but they were feeling too curiously tired and sleepy to understand exactly what was happening. Rudolf, still clasping his

tin sword—that invaluable weapon—pillowed his sleepy head on the shoulder of the Generous Gardener. Ann rested comfortably on the large lap of the Cook-who-liked-living-in-the-Country, and Peter snuggled close beside her, holding Mittens tightly in his arms.

They thought the new non-fadable curtains were packed in somewhere, they thought they saw the kindly face of old Sandy peeping into the mouth of the sack at them while the whole troop of Good Dreams pushed and crowded one another to peer at them over his shoulder. Among all the familiar faces were some they had almost forgotten but were not sorry to see again: the Lady Goose, waving her spoon; the Gentleman Goose, and Squealer and Squawker, his two little duck apprentices; the cheerful grinning countenances of Prowler and Growler, the mates, with Toddles and Towser

the common sea-cats. But at the last all grew dim, faded, melted into mist until two figures only stood out clearly and distinctly. One was the Corn-cob Queen smiling and waving her tiny hand in loving farewell, the other that of a little boy in long trousers and a frill collar, a merry-faced boy with a toy sword buckled round his waist and a toy ship in his hand. Though they had not seen him until now, the children recognized him at once. It was the little boy Aunt Jane had told them of—the Little Boy who Went Away to Sea. It was also the Commander-in-Chief of the tin soldiers, whom the Queen had said they might be allowed to see, if they were good.

Just then the children began to feel it impossible to keep their eyes open any longer. They heard the voices of all their friends calling "Good-by", but they could not answer.

They tried to get one more glimpse of the Good Dreams, but their eyes dropped shut—they were far away.

In the morning Aunt Jane woke to find all three children in her room. Ann jumped into bed on one side of her, Peter, holding Mittens, snuggled himself on the other, and Rudolf bestrode the foot.

"Why, good morning, dears," she said. "Did you sleep well in the big bed?"

The children looked at one another thoughtfully.

"Did you have good dreams?" asked Aunt Jane politely. "I did, I dreamt about you three all night."

"We had funny dreams," said Rudolf, "at least, I suppose they were—" He stopped, looking very puzzled.

"We woke up laughing," Ann said, "and

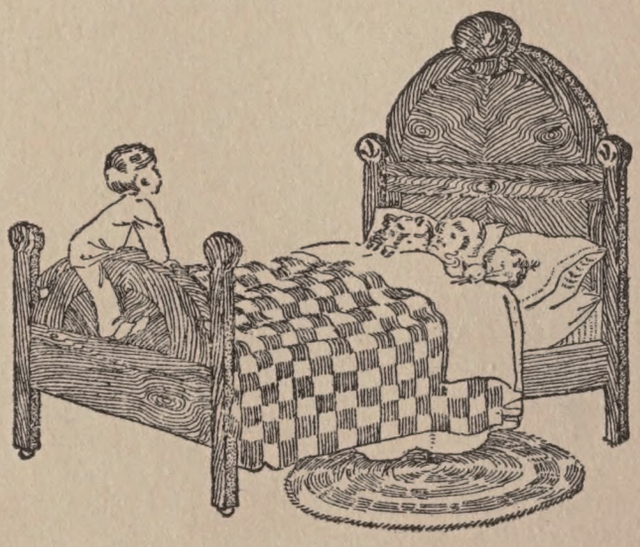
we got right out of bed to come quickly to tell you something awful funny that happened to us, but now—"

"Now we've forgotten it!" finished Rudolf sadly.

Peter said nothing at all. He looked very grave and thoughtful and squeezed Mittens just a little—only a little too hard. The kitten gave a slight squeak.

"Will you be good now?" whispered Peter in his furry ear. "Will you never run away no more—*never?*"

But Mittens would not answer.

THE  END

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